



Unlocking Doors:

Research on Mentoring to Strengthen Skills & Support Career Pathways for Racialized Young Adults



Mentor Canada



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SRDC

Dr. Audrey Appiah

Dr. Jessica McQuiggan

Dr. Jillian Paragg

Dr. Jennifer Rae

Mentor Canada

Dr. Véronique Church-Duplessis

Dr. Ben Dantzer

Peer Researchers

Mahalia Johnna Baguio

Priscilla Wiafoah Twum

External Advisor

Dr. Beverly-Jean Daniel

Report Design

Casper Slack

Mae Slack

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The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

About the cover illustration:

There are many paths and opportunities available for youth in their lives, but some are much harder to access than others, particularly due to systemic barriers facing racialized youth. Youth should have the autonomy to choose which pathways to take, which doors to open, and with whom they make that journey. To best support youth, mentors can help illuminate the path youth choose and work together with them to overcome obstacles in the way. This illustration captures common themes expressed by research study participants: young adulthood is a time of opportunity but also transitions, which can be both exciting and daunting. Racialized youth express a desire for mentors who walk alongside them and help them open doors to the future they envision for themselves. A draft version of this illustration was presented to research study participants, who agreed that it accurately represents their experiences and ideas about early adulthood and mentorship.

We are deeply grateful to all the participants who generously shared their time and experiences for this research. Your contributions are instrumental in the success of this study.

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Project Overview

In this project, we defined 'a mentor' as a caring, trusted person, who is more experienced, and provides guidance, support, and advice. A mentor can help youth and young adults develop skills, knowledge, or confidence, and support youth and young adults as they navigate various aspects of your life.

A natural mentor organically develops a mentoring relationship with youth and young adults without a formal or assigned arrangement. This type of mentorship develops naturally through personal relationships in everyday life. A natural mentor could be someone like an extended family member, teacher, community leader, co-worker, or other individual who provides guidance and support, without being part of a specific mentoring program.

A program mentor is part of a structured mentoring initiative that follows a specific set of guidelines, goals, and often has a specific duration. This type of mentoring is typically offered by organizations (such as workplaces, schools, or community organizations) that match youth and young adults with a mentor they typically did not previously know, to provide support, guidance, or skill development. In mentoring programs, a mentor works with youth and young adults in a purposeful and organized way to help youth achieve personal, academic, or professional goals.

The purpose of this report is to share findings from mixed-methods research conducted with young adults aged 18 to 30 with racialized identities, as well as with stakeholders in the youth mentoring field. The research focuses on what racialized young adults (and stakeholders) have to say about mentoring. Specifically, the research explores how mentoring can strengthen skills and support career development among racialized young adults. This report is intended to inform the work of mentoring organizations, employers, and educators who develop and deliver programs and policies for racialized young adults.

Funding

This project was funded under the Research and Innovation Stream of the Government of Canada's Skills for Success Program. Skills for Success is a framework launched by the Government of Canada over 20 years ago (when it was originally called the Essential Skills framework, sometimes referred to as foundational or transferrable skills). It is a strengths-based, empowerment-oriented way to think about how to assess and train people on the skills they need to succeed today in work, learning, and life. Within this framework, Skills for Success are: Numeracy, Communication, Collaboration, Problem solving, Writing, Adaptability, Reading, Creativity & Innovation, Digital Skills. The objective of the Skills for Success Program is to support research and innovative



projects to identify better ways of helping persons prepare for, return to or keep employment and be productive participants in the labour force. Priority is given to projects that address the needs of ‘under-represented groups’ in the labour market, including Indigenous people, newcomers, and racialized groups.

Project Objectives

The central research question guiding this project was: What is the relationship between mentoring, building and retaining Skills for Success, and youth and emerging racialized adults’ access to quality work early in their careers? The impetus for this project stemmed from previous research findings from youth and mentoring stakeholders across Canada, who signaled a need for more responsive and appropriate approaches to support racialized youth to connect to meaningful employment via mentoring in early adulthood. The goal of this project was to better understand skills needs in the current labour market, and how to build mentoring programs that can enhance foundational and transferrable skills, while being responsive to the distinct strengths and experiences of racialized young adults.

While this project sought to apply critical, intersectional, and racially conscious perspectives and to centre the lived experiences and voices of racialized youth, it is important to note that this was primarily an applied research study about mentoring, rather than about conceptualizing the operation of race. Further, this report on the project is in many ways only a starting point: the data collected is extensive, and the (anonymized) dataset is available for other researchers and stakeholder groups to continue with further analysis and reporting focused on specific sub-groups of racialized youth and other topics of interest to the mentoring field.

Phases of Work

The project consisted of three distinct phases of work spanning a roughly 18-month period (September 2023 to March 2025). Throughout all phases of work, the project included a focus on participatory methods, aligned with principles of community-based research.

The first phase of the project included a literature review and discussions with ten individuals with lived and professional experience related to mentoring. These discussions shaped subsequent decisions about research priorities/questions of interest, as well as research methods. Six individuals agreed to remain engaged as an informal reference/advisory group for the duration of the project. One reference

Terminology in this Report

We recognize the importance of inclusive, anti-racist language, and being intentional and careful in our choice of terminology (Lane, 2019). In this report, we use the terms 'racialized' and 'BIPOC' (Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour). At the outset of the study, we initially adopted the term 'racialized' because it was used by the project funder, ESDC. Once the study was underway, we revisited and engaged in ongoing discussion about the use of this term. We recognized its utility in positioning race as a complex social construct that is imposed (rather than inherent). At the same time, we recognized the limitations of the term, especially its lack of specificity and risk of erasure or conflation of distinct identities and experiences. We also engaged in critical discussion as a team about taking care not to centre whiteness as a dominant experience or default.

As our project progressed, we began to use the term 'BIPOC' in many of our public-facing communications. Our peer researchers were particularly helpful in guiding us toward the use of this term, considering it to be more widely understood, and embraced by youth themselves. In our qualitative research, we offered participants space to describe themselves and aspects of their identities in the words of their own choosing. We found that participants used both terms – 'racialized' and 'BIPOC' – to self-identify.

In this report, we also use the terms 'youth' and 'young adult'. The project funder, ESDC, defines youth as people between the ages of 15 and 30. However, we recognize that 'youth' is more commonly understood to refer to younger individuals (aged 12 to 19), whereas 'young adult' is understood to refer to older individuals (aged 20 to 29). Our study is specifically focused on the experiences of individuals aged 18 to 30.

group member went on to join the project team in a formal role as an external, expert advisor. Further, two youth joined the project team as peer researchers.

Phase 2 of the project involved a nationally representative survey with youth aged 18 to 30 living in Canada (n=3110), oversampling for racialized youth (n=1618). Young people responded to questions about their self-reported demographics; points along their journey to employment (such as accessing training and education, job seeking, and labour market involvement); skills (their perceptions of the most important skills they need to connect to meaningful work, and if and how mentoring and other social supports may help them build these skills); and their access to and experiences with mentoring relationships.

Phase 3 of the project involved qualitative, semi-structured interviews with racialized youth (n=23) and with mentor stakeholders (n=13). Interviews with racialized young people explored their experiences of mentoring as well as their education and employment experiences. Interviews with mentor stakeholders explored the current state of mentoring programs and initiatives for racialized youth, as well as stakeholders' ideas and visions for the future.

Our Research Team

This project was led by our team of researchers from SRDC. SRDC is a mission-driven, Canadian non-profit research organization with a social justice mandate, focused on producing high quality research to support evidence-based decision making. Our SRDC team collaborated closely with a team of researchers from Mentor Canada. Mentor Canada is a non-profit, backbone initiative, driven to accelerate and scale world-class mentoring in Canada by building sector capacity and providing expertise in best and promising practices for mentoring. SRDC and Mentor Canada have previous experience collaborating as partners on the State of Mentoring: Mapping the Mentoring Gap (2021), the first pan-Canadian study exploring young people's access to mentors.

Two peer researchers played a central role in this project as members of our research team involved in planning and carrying out the research. Both peer researchers self-identified as racialized young adults, sharing these important aspects of identity with the research participants of the study. The peer researchers were graduate students in the social sciences who were recruited and hired by our SRDC team in part-time, paid positions (approximately 10 hours per week), supporting the project over a one-year period. SRDC provided the peer researchers with support and training opportunities (both formal and informal) throughout the project.

Our research team was also supported by an external expert advisor, Dr. Beverly-Jean Daniel. Dr. Daniel is an associate professor in the School of Child and Youth Care at Toronto Metropolitan University. For over 25 years, her academic work has investigated and conceptualized race, racism and equity. In 2012, Dr. Daniel founded and developed The Bridge, a groundbreaking student engagement and retention program at Humber College. This program, the first of its kind in any Canadian college or University, identifies the types of programming and strategies that are necessary to foster and enhance academic success in post-secondary institutions amongst students who self-identify as African, Black, and Caribbean.

Positionality

As research team members, we each hold varied individual experiences, identities, and social locations. Our research team includes both racialized and white researchers, and with the exception of the peer researchers, our team members are not youth/emerging adults. Our team members' individual positionalities, as well as our respective roles within the research team, undoubtedly influenced this project in myriad ways, including the questions we asked, our choice of methods,

our relationships with and to participants, and our interpretations of the research data. Research decisions in this project were further impacted by the mandates of the lead organizations, and those of the project funder. Throughout the project, we sought to engage in reflexive practice as a research team, and to be attuned to and openly address issues of power and privilege in our work, but we nevertheless recognize our limitations and inherent biases. We humbly acknowledge that racialized youth themselves are the authority on their own lived experiences.

Reflections from Peer Researchers

Mahalia Johnna Baguio, Peer Researcher

"I had initially viewed my experience working on this project as a bit ironic; I am a racialized youth with no mentoring experiences, working on a research project looking at the impacts of mentoring among racialized youth. Sometimes I would ask myself "What am I doing here? What can I contribute to this study?" I have heard about mentoring before; I know people who have, or had, mentors, or who are mentors themselves. I even know people who run mentoring programs. I just lacked the mentoring experience for myself.

When we were preparing to conduct the youth interviews, I already knew that it would be a bit easier to connect with the interviewees, simply because it would be a conversation between two youths. I knew that having shared identities, or knowing a second language, would play a role in fostering an environment where candid conversations could happen. I did not expect to feel so moved while conducting the youth interviews. Hearing the struggles from youth who had no mentoring experiences, who were trying to understand what a mentor is and isn't; to hearing how they had to figure things out through friends, or allies, or who had to go through things alone, made me feel emotional. I realized later, upon reviewing my transcripts that I was able to hear myself through the participants. I was seeing myself being reflected in these interviews. It was only then that I finally learned that being a racialized youth with no mentoring experiences, is my meaningful contribution to this study.

The value of participatory research is that it ensures that the project is a reflection of the community it is serving. It can also act as a catalyst for change among members of the research team. This opportunity to work as a Peer Researcher has validated my own experiences navigating society as a second-generation, racialized youth. Racialized youth often have similar experiences, and the chance to have a mentor is just one of the many ways to remind us that we are not alone. It has also shifted my perspective of mentoring. I initially believed that mentors were only for career guidance, but I have now realized that mentorship is multi-faceted; it's a chance to learn,

grow, and explore what it means to be a person. This work has inspired me to seek out mentorship opportunities for myself, and I look forward to seeing the impacts this project will have on the future of the mentoring landscape.”

“Racialized youth often have similar experiences, and the chance to have a mentor is just one of the many ways to remind us that we are not alone.”

Priscilla Wiafoah Twum, Peer Researcher

“I remember stepping into my role as a peer researcher with SRDC, feeling a bit unsure about the true meaning of mentorship. I’d always pictured mentors as distant role models; people whose lives felt too far removed from my own. But as I dug deeper into our Mentorship for Racialized Youth project, I realized mentorship can be more than just admiring someone from afar. It’s about building genuine, human connections with people who see your potential and help you tap into it.

One of the highlights of my work was helping to develop survey questions that truly resonated with youth. Questions that spark those “aha” moments rather than just checking a box. In the process, We couldn’t ignore the racial aspect at play. As a racialized newcomer, I know how both race and the experience of being new to a country can shape one’s access to opportunities and the type of support received. It can be exhausting to focus on race and labels over and over again, but it’s impossible to dismiss the impact they have on our experiences. So, it was exciting to create questions that looked beyond surface-level data, really digging into the barriers youth face.

Then came the interviews with participants, and I’ll admit I felt timid at first. What if I couldn’t draw out the stories or data we needed? Thankfully, I had amazing project leads who guided me and helped me find my footing. One breakthrough moment happened when an interviewee mentioned using LinkedIn to connect with professionals they admire, something I’d never considered doing myself. That sparked a realization that mentorship isn’t just about waiting around for guidance; sometimes, it’s about actively chasing opportunities. Of course, that can be exhausting, especially when you’re unsure where to begin. But I decided to take the leap: I revamped my own LinkedIn profile and reached out to people I’d once been too intimidated to approach. Yes, it was nerve-wracking, but the sense of empowerment that followed was worth every moment of self-doubt.

Hearing so many personal stories also shifted my perspective on resilience. It isn’t just about powering through adversity; sometimes, it means pausing to breathe, re-centre, and then moving forward with fresh energy. Looking back, I’m grateful for how this project expanded my view of mentorship. It’s

not some lofty, out-of-touch concept. It's a powerful tool that can open doors, build confidence, and ignite the courage to chase goals I once thought were out of reach. Should it always be about chasing opportunities? Maybe not. But sometimes we have to push ourselves a bit. Change can be slow, yet I believe this project is a step in the right direction.

“If we keep connecting youth with mentors who see them beyond just labels or backgrounds, we'll build a world where more of us dare to reach out, ask for help, and truly thrive.”

Engagement with Experts

At the outset of the study, our SRDC research team met with ten individuals with lived and professional experience related to mentoring and developing and delivering supports and services for racialized youth. These meetings, which lasted about 30 to 60 minutes each, focused on the following points of discussion: the research questions of interest; the proposed methods; the most useful project outputs; applying intersectional/anti-oppressive/anti-racist lenses in work on mentorship; and foundational work in the field to build upon.

Mentorship

What mentorship means for racialized youth

Experts we spoke to shared that they were interested in finding out what mentorship means for racialized youth, including whether or not the term ‘mentoring’ resonates with youth, and what role mentorship or mentor-type relationships currently play in the lives of racialized youth. They also emphasized that although much mentorship programming is career-driven, youth have multiple identities (not just a career-centred identity), and likely access mentors in multiple ways. They also emphasized that youth should be asked about the ways that they have access to mentoring outside of work and education.

How mentors and mentoring programs can best support racialized youth

Experts we spoke to were interested in what makes a good mentor and/or mentoring program, from the perspectives of racialized youth. They wanted us to ask youth what characteristics they think make a good mentor and what the qualities in a mentor are that matter to youth, along with an interest in learning from youth about programs in their community that they think are doing good work with BIPOC youth (e.g., what is it about these programs that is working for youth, and what are the

best approaches to reaching racialized youth?)

How mentors can build trust with racialized youth

Experts were interested in who youth trust the most or feel closest to, and what characteristics those relationships hold. In other words, what does it take to get mentoring relationships to a point of understanding and trust? Other questions of interest included how many times racialized youth meet with someone or connect with someone before they start to feel that trust is emerging, along with signs that someone is worthy of trust.

Mentor screening and training

Experts cautioned that mentors can cause harm to racialized youth, and emphasize the need for careful mentor screening and training. Relatedly, they were interested in the extent that youth have had negative experiences with authority figures in their lives, and what spaces they have been made to feel unsafe within or have found punitive.

What an ideal mentorship program might look like for racialized youth

Experts emphasized the importance of asking racialized youth what their ideal mentorship program would look like. One of the experts we spoke to further identified peer-to-peer mentors as a form of mentorship that could be explored, if youth perceive it to be valuable.

The Structural Conditions of Racialized Youths' Lived Experiences

Experts we spoke to shared the importance of being aware of how the contexts that racialized youth are living within impact their opportunities, experiences, and perspectives, namely the impact of racial capitalism and neo-liberal individualism within settler colonial contexts. Dominant cultural ideals reinforced by previous generations (i.e., Baby Boomers) about 'success' (e.g., meeting particular life stage trajectories, like educational achievements, career goals, and levels of income) tend to be focused around maintaining the capitalist system (i.e., 'success' is tied to levels of productivity and consumerism). However, these ideals may no longer be held up by racialized young adults today. One way this generational shift is evident is in the phrase "I do not dream of labour," a popular social media meme. This shift could be due to the inaccessibility of educational/career and other socio-economic class systems, stemming from barriers that racialized young adults'

encounter within systemic oppression (and related reactions to systemic issues like climate anxiety). As the framework of racial capitalism argues [Robinson 2020 (1983)] capitalism is organized around racial lines, including Canada's colour-coded labour market (Block and Galabuzi 2011). Generational shifts can also be seen as a reflection of wanting to re-shape systems and build different kinds of ways of being, collectives, and communities. One expert highlighted Disability Justice Frameworks as a central reference point for how to approach questions about youths' lived experiences.

Experts emphasized that in such fraught contexts, questions for youth need to be posed in ways that do not make assumptions about their needs (material and emotional) being met, how they view their futures, or what their aspirations may be (educational, career, or otherwise). Questions asked around these topic areas should include open-ended wording that does not presume anything about youth and their aspirations, one way or another, such as:

- What do you spend your time on during the day? (e.g., skill building, surviving, tuning the world out)
- How do you conceptualize education (e.g., going through motions of linear pathway? Stress and anxiety of what is to come? Focused on current survival? What are your learning stories? Is schooling fulfilling? A supportive or unsupportive environment? Or pushed as 'the right way to do things'?
- What does the future look like for you? Are the circumstances around the world/that you live within impacting your future? How?
- How are things happening around you changing the way you think about your future?
- Are you able to meet your basic living needs? When growing up/do you experience a lot of anxiety about meeting your needs? Social safety net/do you feel like you have someone who you could fall back on?
- How would you describe your situation growing up and now (e.g., socio-economic class and other statuses like newcomer)
- Where do you feel like you can actually be you? What are the conditions that enable you to show up as your full authentic self?
- What are the hopes you may or may not have had for yourself/how it's going/ what do you hope for yourself for the future now?
- If you have a mentor in some capacity, how do you see this as impacting your pathway or plan?

Navigating Structural Conditions as a Racialized Youth is a Skill: Moving Beyond Skills for Success

Experts we spoke to were interested in exploring how youth go about selecting mentors, particularly in predominantly white spaces. Experts noted that navigating white spaces, code switching, advocating for oneself, and building one's confidence in systemically racist systems are important skills for survival that BIPOC youth have and deploy. This moves beyond the Skills for Success framework to recognize the resiliency skill-building of racialized youth.

Intersectional identities and varying access to institutional, cultural, and social capital

Experts emphasized the need to continuously consider intersectionality. Racialized youth have a variety of experiences and are impacted by systemic oppression in different ways. Further, experts emphasized how young peoples' multitude of identities also impacts what institutional, cultural, and social capital they have access to, due to the structural conditions that they find themselves within. For example, Canadian born youth, immigrant youth, and 1.5 generation youth (those who came to Canada as children), hold and have access to different cultural and social capital, and this further differs based on youth's geographic context (rural/urban/northern). Black youth and Indigenous youth encounter the specificities of anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racisms. The different types of supports that youth, and specifically newcomer, Black, and Indigenous youth may need as mentees must be considered (D'Antimo 2021; Flitner et al. 2023).

Research Methods

After conducting the review of existing literature and engaging with experts, our research team launched the data collection phases of this project, consisting of a quantitative youth survey, and qualitative interviews both with youth and mentor stakeholders. The research methods and study protocols (including both the quantitative survey measure and the qualitative interview guide) were reviewed and approved by the Community Research Ethics Office in July 2024.

Youth Survey

Measures

The survey was developed collaboratively by the SRDC research team, Mentor Canada research team, and the peer researchers. We began by drawing measures used in previous mentoring research, including the Who Mentored You? study

by Garringer and Benning (2023), the study of college students' mentoring relationships during postsecondary transitions by Hagler, Christensen & Rhodes (2024), as well as the previous SRDC & Mentor Canada youth mentoring survey Mapping the Mentoring Gap (2020). We then conducted a broader scan to identify other relevant, existing survey measures, including those available through SRDC's Customizable Outcomes Measurement and Skills Assessment tool.

We selected publicly available, validated measures for inclusion in the survey when possible, including the Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (Clark 2010); the Flourishing Scale (Diener et al., 2010), the Social Capital Assessment + Learning for Equity (SCALE) Measures (Search Institute, 2021), and career adaptability measures (Koen et al., 2021).

In addition to existing measures, we developed some new measures, particularly to assess constructs related to community cultural wealth and resistance capital (ability to challenge inequity). We drew inspiration from the First Nations Regional Early Childhood, Education and Employment Survey (FNIGC, 2022), the Canadian Youth Reconciliation Barometer (Environics Institute for Survey Research 2019), Hiamori et al (2021), Hurd (2024), and the GTA Youth Employment Survey (Malatest & Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council, 2023).

The overall draft survey was reviewed and pilot tested by two members of the reference group and by our external research advisor, who provided feedback on readability, interpretation, and contextual and cultural appropriateness. The final survey included 6 sections: background & demographic information; experiences with school and work; skills; people in your life, how you are doing overall; and experiences with mentoring.

The survey was designed to take 20 minutes to complete. The survey was available in both English and French. While all questions were mandatory, an option such as “prefer not to say”, “unsure”, or “tell us in your own words” was available as a response option on all questions.

Data Collection

Young people between the ages of 18 to 30 were recruited by Maru Matchbox, a market research firm with an established panel community of individuals across Canada. Panel members are incentivized to complete surveys on an ongoing basis. Eligible participants were asked to complete the online survey. The survey was in the field between July and August 2024.

Analysis

Maru Matchbox performed a data quality check (to protect against speeding, straight lining, etc.) and data processing (sample balancing/weighting the data) before providing the data set to SRDC for further analysis. Weighting was done to adjust for variations in the study population that deviated from actual proportions of the population according to Statistics Canada data, on characteristics of age, province of residence, and gender identity. Weights were calculated by dividing the population proportion (desired proportion) for each group by the actual proportion of interviews collected for each group.

The SRDC research team and a peer researcher performed the data analysis using STATA software.

Youth Interviews

Semi-structured interview guides were developed collaboratively by the SRDC research team, Mentor Canada research team, and the peer researchers, and reviewed by members of the reference group. Youth interviews focused on education and career experiences of racialized youth, and experiences with mentoring, and could include the following:

- Life experiences since turning 18, such as important places youth spend time, their strengths and skills, significant roadblocks, goals for the future, etc.
- What mentorship means to youth
- Perceptions of mentors, important qualities of a mentor or mentor relationship
- Potential experiences with mentors or times when they may have benefited from a mentor
- Ideas around what makes a good mentorship relationship / program for young racialized people

As the interviews were semi-structured, questions were re-ordered, re-worded, and added or omitted at the discretion of the interviewer.

Recruitment

Youth interviewees were recruited through an online screener through Google Forms. The screener was promoted broadly through known youth employment service-focused organizations, mentoring organizations, existing youth-focused contacts of SRDC and Mentor Canada, as well as through social media. Visual

assets targeted to youth 18 to 30 in Canada were distributed broadly, with the online screener collecting detailed information that identified youth as eligible for the research interviews or not.

The screener was open from July to October 2024. The SRDC research team and peer researchers selected individuals to reach out to via email for interviews on a rolling basis from August – October 2024 based on:

- Geographic location
- Racial and ethno-cultural identity
- Age
- Experience with mentoring

The ultimate goal was not to hear from a nationally representative sample of youth, but rather to hear from a diverse range of experiences. In total, nearly 80 youth completed the screener survey, and 25 youth were selected to participate in interviews. In the end 23 youth were interviewed in total.

Data Collection

Youth interviews were conducted by the peer researchers. To support participant and researcher wellbeing, peer researchers were provided training on trauma-informed data collection procedures prior to beginning data collection. These included sharing interview themes with participants in advance as well as providing a community resource card containing the contact information for crisis support organizations after the interview. A disclosure of harm protocol was developed so that researchers were prepared to respond in a trauma-informed way in the event of an interview participant disclosing an imminent risk of harm to themselves or others.

Each interview was conducted in English and lasted approximately 60 minutes in length. All were conducted virtually over Zoom, at a time that was convenient for the interviewee. Interview participants were welcome to keep their cameras on or off. Interviews were recorded and transcripts were generated. After interviews were complete, interview participants received a \$100 e-transfer as a thank-you for their time.

Analysis

Transcripts of youth interviews were automatically generated using the recording software, then manually cleaned and verified by data collectors. Analysis occurred in stages. Shortly after each interview was completed, the interviewer

recorded key themes in an interview tracker. Themes included youth experiences, challenges, aspirations and goals, and impacts of mentoring, as well as other notes deemed important by the interviewer. After all interviews were complete, these anonymized summaries were uploaded into Quirkos using the online cloud storage platform. The research team collaboratively developed a coding structure using a combination of inductive and deductive thematic analysis.

Next, verified transcripts were uploaded into NVivo software and thematically coded according to the codebook developed in the previous step.

Stakeholder Interviews

In addition to hearing directly from youth, one-on-one interviews were also conducted with “mentor stakeholders”, individuals involved in mentoring in their work, supporting racialized young people in their career development journeys in some way. Individuals and organizations were invited to participate as mentor stakeholders, who could speak to overall patterns or trends when working with large numbers of young people over many years. This perspective provides an additional opportunity to explore mentorship for racialized youth beyond individual experiences.

Semi-structured interview guides were developed collaboratively by the SRDC research team, Mentor Canada research team, and the peer researchers, and reviewed by members of the reference group. Mentor stakeholder interviews focused on interviewees’ experiences working with racialized youth. The protocol included topics such as:

- Unique strengths and barriers for racialized youth in their work/employment journey
- The current landscape for people who are racialized, such as urgent and emerging priorities, the role of social media, etc.
- Mentor stakeholder experiences reaching, engaging, and supporting racialized youth
- What an ideal mentorship relationship or program for racialized youth might look like

Similar to the youth interviews, questions were re-ordered, re-worded, and added or omitted at the discretion of the interviewer.

Recruitment

Mentor stakeholder interviewees were also recruited through an online screener

using a similar strategy described above. When we reached out to youth-serving organization and requested they share the youth screener, we also invited program administrators to complete a separate screener for mentor stakeholders. Once again, the screener was open to everyone and determined eligibility for the mentor stakeholder interviews.

The research team selected individuals to reach out to via email for interviews on a rolling basis from September – November 2024. Selection of mentor stakeholders was based largely on geographic location, type of mentoring program offered, and availability.

Data Collection

Mentor stakeholder interviews were conducted by the SRDC research team and peer researchers. Although direct personal experience as a racialized person was less of a focus of the mentor stakeholder interviews, the research team again adopted a trauma-informed approach to data collection. This included sharing interview themes with participants in advance as well as developing a disclosure of harm protocol.

As with youth interviews, each interview was conducted in English and lasted approximately 60 minutes in length. All were conducted virtually over Teams or Zoom, at a time that was convenient for the interviewee. Interview participants were welcome to keep their cameras on or off. Interviews were recorded and transcripts were generated. After interviews were complete, mentor stakeholders who participated on their own time received a \$100 e-transfer as a thank-you for their time.

Respondents were categorized into a racialized / white ad hoc variable based on their self-reported race and, in some cases, ethnicity characteristics. Specifically, respondents who did not identify as white only (they could select more than one response), or who identified as First Nations, Inuit/Inuk, or Métis, were assigned to the racialized group. Respondents who identified as white and no other race were assigned to the white group, unless they identified as First Nations, Inuit/Inuk, or Métis.

Analysis

The same analysis protocol was employed mentor stakeholders as for youth: Transcripts were automatically generated using the recording software, then manually cleaned and verified by data collectors, with key themes being recorded in an interview tracker. Themes included youth and mentor stakeholder

experiences, challenges, and strategies, as well as other notes deemed important by the interviewer. After all interviews were complete, these anonymized summaries were uploaded into Quirkos using the online cloud storage platform. The research team collaboratively developed a coding structure using a combination of inductive and deductive thematic analysis.

Next, verified transcripts were uploaded into NVivo software and thematically coded according to the codebook developed in the previous step.

Description of the Research Sample

Youth Survey

The youth in the survey sample consisted of $n=3,110$ young adults ages 18 to 30 living in Canada. The sample was designed to be nationally representative according to age, sex, and approximate geographic location. Thus, there were slightly fewer 18 to 24 year-olds than those 25+, with the average age being 25 years. Slightly more than half of the sample identified as women, with 47 per cent identifying as men and 2 per cent as non-binary. Similar to the overall population of Canada, the majority of respondents came from Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia. Eighty-one per cent of respondents lived in a city compared to a small town or remote area.

Nearly two-thirds of respondents ($n=1618$, 63 per cent) identified as racialized, including 6 per cent who identified as Indigenous. English was the most common language spoken by respondents, followed by French. Nearly three-quarters (73 per cent) were born in Canada, and more than half (54 per cent) had parents and grandparents who were born in Canada. Fourteen per cent of the sample identified as living with a disability.

More than three-quarters of the sample had at least some post-secondary education, with 56 per cent having completed a college, university, or post-graduate program. One-third of the sample described currently experiencing financial stress and having difficulty paying for the basic items they need. Approximately 28 per cent of the sample reported their family experiencing financial stress growing up.

Youth Interviews

Twenty-three BIPOC youth aged 18 to 30 participated in research interviews. Sixteen identified with she/her pronouns and seven with he/him pronouns. Despite efforts to recruit interviewees from across the country, 17 lived in Ontario, with

the remaining youth living in Alberta (n=3), BC (n=1), Manitoba (n=1), and Quebec (n=1). Most lived in an urban setting, with n=1 in a rural area and n=6 in a suburban setting. Youth held a variety of ethno-cultural identities, including Caribbean, Chinese, Indian, Indigenous, Filipino, Nigerian, South Asian, Tamil, as well as many intersecting racial and ethnic identities.

Interviewees were at various educational and career stages, including:

- **N=1** was considering their career path
- **N=10** were currently in a post-secondary program
- **N=5** were new graduates trying to determine next steps (looking for work, further education)
- **N=7** were working in a variety of capacities, such as:
 - freelance artists, part-time, and/or contract employees
 - in government
 - in management roles
 - established professionals with more than 5 years experience
 - in community organizations or non-profits

At least one interviewee had recently been laid off from employment; another was in the armed forces; another was recently released from a correctional institution. Thus, while not meant to be a representative sample, the youth interviewees were a diverse group with a variety of lived experiences and interactions with mentorship.

Mentoring Stakeholder Interviews

Mentor stakeholder interviews were conducted with 13 adults who identified as mentors or working in mentoring organizations. Similar to the youth interview sample, mentor stakeholder interviewees were clustered in Ontario, Alberta, and BC. All but one identified as Black, Indigenous, or a Person of Colour. Mentor stakeholder interviewees worked in community-based organizations, employment-based mentoring programs, and post-secondary institutions. The organizations that were represented by the mentor stakeholder interviewees served a variety of populations, such as:

- Black, Asian, and/or South Asian students
- Women and gender-diverse young adults
- Immigrant youth

- Racialized youth
- Youth pursuing specific professional or academic paths

Although age of mentor stakeholders was not collected, some interviewees might have also been eligible for the youth interviews. That is, some mentor stakeholders were also racialized young adults under age 30. Thus, while the content of the interviews was distinct, the groups were overlapping, and mentor stakeholders frequently drew on their own lived experiences in their interviews in addition to describing their experience interacting with racialized youth in a mentoring context.

Research Findings from Youth

In this section, we present findings from the youth survey and youth interviews. First, we summarize findings that can help understand racialized youth: their views on success, their skills and strengths, and their life experiences. We take note of what youth are going through that mentorship could help with. Then, we summarize findings about racialized youth and mentoring: their perspectives on mentoring and mentors, their experiences accessing and receiving mentorship, and the impacts of mentoring on their lives.

Understanding Racialized Youth Perspectives & Experiences

Views of Success

“I think success feels like that you have a healthy body, being well mentally, physically. Also, being financially free

In interviews, youth were asked to describe what success in education and career meant to them. Many youth discussed the importance of being financially stable as a key aspect of success. Financial stability was often framed as making enough money to support a family, own a home, being able to buy what you want and need, and in general being less worried,

The most common ways that racialized youth define success at school and work are:

- being mentally and physically healthy
- living a balanced life (work/life balance)
- achieving financial success
- having a job that is reliable and stable
- having freedom

These are also the top five ways white youth define success.

signalling a link between financial stability and impacts on mental health.

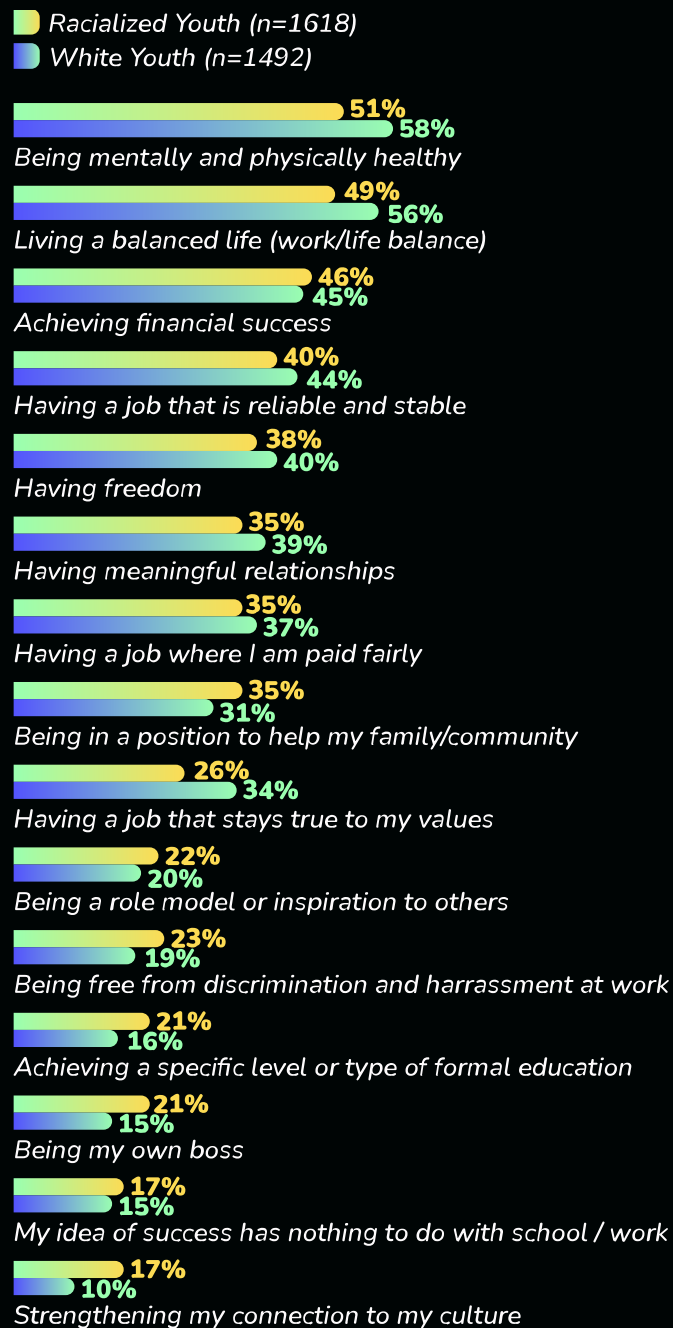
For a few youth, financial success went hand in hand with having a career that they loved. However, for others, financial success was imagined apart from career. One

youth narrated what their version of success would be if they had financial independence, and did not have to work in their current survival job. To them this would mean pursuing their artistic work full-time, and everything that goes along with that – being their own boss, setting their own schedule, and working on their own passion projects. They also noted how their current financial situation has delayed them in starting a family:

“If it was a perfect world and I had an unlimited amount of money, I would probably have kids by now. I would probably own my own property and be working a job that - I mean as much as I love [current job], it’s the job that pays my bills. If I could, I would be a full-time artist all the time. I wouldn’t work on a schedule... I don’t like being told what to do... It has nothing to do with the job itself, it’s just the idea that I am scheduled by someone else to operate on their time. So, if it was a perfect world, I wouldn’t have any schedule, and I just wake up and do what I wanted that day. So that’s actually the goal that I’m working towards... I’m trying to find a life where that can exist.”

Financial stability was rarely the sole notion of success that youth

Racialized and white youth generally define success at school and work in similar ways



(Finding from national survey with n=1618 racialized youth and n=1492 white youth)

shared, nor was it a siloed notion. Youth recognized that financial stability is one interconnected part of success, along with good mental and bodily health, good relationships, hobbies – in other words, life outside paid work. Further, some youth described the importance of keeping the personal separate from their career. One youth, while wanting to draw on her Indigenous cultural lens for their paid work and career, also did not want to commodify her culture. She saw culture as something that is sacred that is not to be bound up in career.

One youth shared that financial and mental health stability will enable her to accomplish other goals that she aspires to. She positioned her career and financial stability as a stepping stone to accomplishing these other goals.

“I think that success doesn’t only come from your career, but other things in your life being fulfilled. So once I have my career, I think that will enable me to achieve a lot of other things like in my life, once I’m stable in life financially and mentally, that will help me to achieve other things. Like if I’ve ever wanted to pick up a new instrument that I’ve never done, I’ll be able to do that kind of thing once I’m stable in life. Or let’s say, start a family. That’s the kind of thing I would be able to do at that point. So, I think they’re all linked together with my career, but I don’t think the career itself is success to me.”

Other youth saw financial success as just one aspect of success, sharing that it went hand and hand with other parts of their lives, including being healthy, happy, having good relationships, and being able to meet basic needs.

“I just want to be happy. I want to have a roof over my head and I want to have good family, good relationships with my family. I want to surround myself with good people and I just want to be happy. That’s the one of my aspirations. I am happy and I want to continue that.”

“I think success looks like motivation to me. Success looks like getting up every day and making sure that you do the basics, making sure that you you’re clean, you get enough sunlight, you get enough water, you get enough exercise even if you don’t do all of your tasks for the day, as long as you’re healthy and happy, I think, that’s what’s success looks like.”

Dedication to Social Impact

“I get a lot of enjoyment out of helping others understand things. It’s very much what drives me.”

“I’m good at offering help to others.”

For the majority of youth interviewees, making a difference in their communities was also a key way to define success. Youth expressed how a dedication to social impact work has played a part in their chosen educational and career paths, at times in response to racism and injustices they have experienced in their own lives. Several youth talked about how they have been driven to pursue career paths that made a difference in the lives of others; this theme of giving back or helping others also emerged consistently as a personal strength and skill that youth identified in themselves.

One youth described how she continues to work in a predominantly white artistic field because she wants to represent to other people of colour that it can be done – that people of colour and people of outside of privileged socio-economic classes take up space in the field, even if it does not cater to them.

“In order to be a change for good and to show people that there is an example. There is someone out there and there are people out there who are different who are doing [this art form]. And it’s not just for white people. It’s not just for rich people, and it’s not for the educated either.”

Further, working towards social impact was something that several youth pursued outside of their paid work, through volunteer activities. One youth described how she sees giving back as necessary because of how she has benefited from a cycle of others giving their time.

“One of my aspirations is to continue to give back my time. I’ve always found an opportunity in my life to volunteer and give back in some way or form, and I want to continue to do that and maybe even ramp that up. So that’s something I want to have as a vein throughout my life. Volunteering and giving back is really important to me because I received so much in my life through people who have been generous with their time and their money as well. And so I think it’s important to just kind of make that cyclical on my end as well.”

Skills & Strengths

Youth have a wide variety of skills and knowledge. When asked in the **national survey** where they learned their most important skills, the top responses for racialized youth included: through life experience, learning on the job, from family, from formal education/school, and through independent learning on their own. Notably, **21 per cent of all racialized youth say that they learned their most important skills from a mentor.**

“As a person of colour, you have to seek different paths and what not. So, I do want to find other ways to do things and think about that type of thing a lot.

As one youth shared, people of colour need to be creative in the paths that they seek. When asked about their skills and strengths, some youth focused on ‘concrete’ skills, such as communication skills, including writing, knowing multiple languages, and digital literacy skills. However, youth also spoke about a broad conceptualization of other skills and strengths.

When narrating their lived experiences, it was also evident that due to systemic racism within Canadian social structures and institutions, youth are continuously learning how to navigate predominantly white institutions and structures, as well as interpersonal racism, including the specificities of anti-Indigenous and anti-Black racism, which Indigenous and Black respondents are subject to.

Almost half of youth interviewees identified their skills and strengths as building community, making connections, and resilience, including intergenerational

Many racialized youth develop their most important skills through experiential learning and from family



(Finding from national survey with n=1618 racialized youth)

resilience. For example, one youth noted that she was the first person in her family for generations who was not forced to attend residential school. Several newcomer youth shared how they persisted in navigating the Canadian system despite encountering systemic barriers.

Youth described their skills and strengths by referencing their: adaptive and learning mindsets; ability to identify patterns and problem solve; persistence and consistency; empathy and inclusivity toward others; self-compassion and care, including navigating imposter syndrome as an outcome of racism; and, storytelling ability.

“If you let life happen to you it will be shitty. It takes energy to cultivate joy and opportunity and good and so that’s something that I’ve learned. You need to cultivate your own joy.”

“I’ve always tried to connect with people and be empathetic to their situation and just be a good human. And that’s actually gotten me quite far in terms of academic and professional opportunity.”

Lived Experiences

Resistance capital is a form of cultural wealth that involves knowledge and skills gained through challenging inequity. It can be passed down through generations and can include verbal and non-verbal behaviours. Resistance capital is key to navigating racially hostile education and workplace settings.

About two-thirds (63 per cent) of racialized youth reported high levels of resistance capital skills. The most common skills include taking action to create a more fair or equitable society (83 per cent) and speaking up when they see discrimination, bias, or racism (82 per cent).

(Finding from national survey with n=1618 racialized youth)

The Skills for Success Model

While capturing skills that are of use in the workforce, relies on a limited conceptualization of what skills are – largely focused on what is deemed a skill within settler colonial/racial capitalism. While the skills that BIPOC youth hold include these skills, they also include so much more.

Defining Life Moments

Youth shared some of the key events and moments of their lives that have had a large impact on them and their trajectories to date. Youth who were in high school and/or had started post-secondary during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic talked about the impact on their school experiences, including their ability to form friendships during that period.

Youth who had immigrated to Canada as children or teenagers, or had parents who immigrated to Canada, described coming to Canada a key juncture in their lives and the lives of their families.

One youth talked about her identity as a ‘third culture kid.’

“I was born somewhere, raised somewhere else, and now moved somewhere else... And so it’s hard for me really to identify truly with the colour of my, not the colour of my skin, but where I’m ethnically from, because I feel like I’m from three different places really.”

Multiple youth discussed how they grew up in financial insecurity, and as a result continue to be hypervigilant around finances. Some youth grew up in single parent households, which they indicated impacted their families’ financial situations, contributing to financial insecurity. One youth identified seeing her mother move from being on social assistance to finishing post-secondary and finding employment, which changed her family’s financial situation. This experience also demonstrated to the youth the importance of education, which has stayed with her throughout her life. Some youth talked about their experiences as the first generation in their families to attend higher education.

One youth identified as justice-involved and had been incarcerated, and shared how this experience had a pivotal impact on his life trajectory.

Racialized Lived Experiences

***“ [As people of colour] we often don’t have the same sort of resources that other individuals may have and we often experience certain challenges or life experiences or barriers that other people may not have.*”**

As Black, Indigenous, and other youth of colour, intertwined with their defining life moments are continuous experiences with racialization (how race is socially produced and read on their bodies by others) and racism.

Over the course of their lives, BIPOC youth have had to navigate white systems, structures and institutions, and the perceptions of those who interact with them at an interpersonal level. For example, multiple youth discussed that those who look whiter or speak better English will have an easier time as they will be taken more seriously in white systems and institutions.

In turn, Black and Indigenous youth must navigate the specificities of anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racisms. For example, one Black youth discussed how she experiences others’ stereotypes about Black people being aggressive, but that at the same time, in order to get people to listen to her, she needs to behave in an assertive way, which in turn gets labeled as aggressive (put another way, she is simultaneously invisible and hyper-visible).

“I think it’s unfortunate that from a very young age [as a Black girl] you’re made to kind of feel like you need to be super aggressive and kind of push at people in order to kind of make a way for yourself. I wish that there was more space to just be little girls.”

Indigenous youth discussed enduring racism and stereotypes from multiple types of people who they encounter, from teachers and professors, to their own white family members. One youth shared the following:

“I think that in Canada a lot of people assume that as Indigenous people we’re messy, we’re unorganized. We don’t have follow through. We don’t work hard - like these are all like very ingrained ideas that people have about Indigenous people. And that’s what I feel like I have to prove all the time that no, I’m organized. I have followed through. I can wake up early. I don’t show up late.”

Some youth discussed the emotional labour that it takes to respond to microaggressions, for example deciding whether and how to respond to constantly being asked ‘where are you from?’ (which implies ‘you do not belong here’). Youth also discussed the impact that intergenerational trauma has had on their families, resulting from navigating settler colonialism and other racist systems. One youth discussed navigating internalized racism, both personally and in the form of lateral violence from other community members.

“I can totally understand [internalized] racism and it’s something that I want to make sure that I keep on checking with myself because of how complex my upbringing has been.”

One youth discussed experiences navigating imposter syndrome, an outcome of which also includes the need to excel at everything that they do. This same youth further noted how her community has helped her to start to challenge these feelings. By meeting people from similar backgrounds who have managed to create great lives for themselves, she knows that she can do the same for herself. Similarly, other youth noted how they derive strength from their communities, which can serve as sites of respite from racist systems and institutions.

“I have a lot of imposter syndrome. And then when I think about all these structural ways in which our society is created, I’m like ‘OK, I am not an impostor. These people are just assholes.’”

Education Experiences

When reflecting on their experiences with education, some youth noted that **individual teachers, academic advisors and guidance counsellors** across different

levels of schooling took an interest in supporting and encouraging them.



I think there was one teacher in high school who was very dedicated to making sure I succeeded....she reached out to me and did more than like the bare minimum to make sure I was understanding stuff and adjusting lesson plans. Just very, very lovely...she definitely made me feel like I could accomplish way more than I limited myself to.

One youth shared that she was granted entry into a gifted school outside of her jurisdiction, because her mother went to the principal to advocate for her to be able to apply to the school. Her experience demonstrates what can happen when youth have someone to advocate for them, and when barriers are removed for them to access resources.

"I was also classified as gifted in elementary and high school, and I think that might have also helped with university applications and getting into [University]. I received a scholarship for my first year...I went to a high school that was fantastic because I was classified as gifted. It opened a lot of doors and we had great counselors and gifted programs that would give us these opportunities like this [business entrepreneurship camp], and would take us to the opera and take us to a Harvard Model United Nations, and different types of things. So, I had a lot of opportunities through there that would help me build my CV that would take me to [University]...And I think getting into that school is one of the things that changed the trajectory of my life. I found my current partner at that school. And there were a lot of teachers there who really cared about me and made sure that I did well and gave me grace when I needed it in order to get the grades that I needed to get into a good university as well. I had that gifted program, and it had a lot of extracurricular opportunities."

While some youth had opportunities and resources that they could access, schools were not always a place where youth felt safe to show themselves.

"It was just a place of education. I didn't really feel like... it was like, OK, but I also wasn't like super comfortable in it. But like it was still an OK place. I still made some friends. It was still able to challenge me academically. Gave me some great opportunities, such as like a mentorship program that really changed my career direction that I wanted to go into. So, it was like an OK school."

One Indigenous youth spoke of the outright racism and microaggressions that she experienced from professors in post-secondary, and how this motivated her to prove professors wrong, by working hard and doing well in her courses.

Youth experiencing this pressure and burnout from such a young age, self-isolating, as well as lack of supports and feeling like they need to go it alone, signals that they are navigating many things in this formative life period. Pressure to succeed in spaces that are not always comfortable or safe for them inhibits youth from being safe or comfortable to reach out for or access supports. For many BIPOC youth, the pandemic likely exacerbated the disconnect from school that they already felt.

This pressure to succeed could be about youth wanting to do well for themselves, as well as being told by teachers and family that it is important for them to do well, but there are also other factors at play. This internalized pressure stems, as above, from youth feeling the need to negate societal stereotypes about BIPOC youth as well as racist stereotypes that teachers and professors hold. Further, while familial pressures could be from families wanting youth to do well, there are larger contextual factors that need to be considered, such as the impacts of intergenerational trauma from settler colonialism and imperialism.

There are systemic legacies at work impacting BIPOC youth and their families with regard to school. School for Indigenous youth may be a space that symbolizes intergenerational trauma, with the ongoing legacy of the residential school system, as well as a space of intergenerational trauma for youth whose families lived under colonial states, where schooling was used as a tool of white supremacist imperialism and assimilation.

Further, a related and striking theme around school emerged from multiple youth who felt an intense pressure to succeed in school from a very young age, which resulted in burn out.

“When I was in elementary school, high school, university, I worked really freaking hard and I was very disciplined with my time and my energy, and I honestly think I just burnt out.”

Other youth shared how they felt like they had to go it alone in school, at times resulting from their anxiety around others’ perceptions of them, which led to further self-isolation and burnout. Youth who were in secondary school at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic also noted that this created feelings of isolation and disconnection from their peers.

I kind of just stayed around like me and my friends and I kind of just like was just like kind of alone. And so I didn’t get the full [high school] experience. I had a lot of social anxiety, so I didn’t really want to branch out. And so I kind of just preferred to stay to myself.

[In grade 11 and 12] I had a big burnout phase. I feel like going through that definitely helped me get out of, like, you know, the wormhole of, like, you know, too much overloading and not being able to say no to things and not prioritizing, not time blocking, not focusing... I think I isolated myself a lot when I was going through burnout. I didn’t want anyone to really see what I was going through, um, you know, because I was so used to being on top

of things.”

Work Experiences

“I try to work on the days that I don’t have class.”

Youth described their work experience and career paths to date. Multiple youth currently in post-secondary noted that they work part-time jobs to support themselves during their studies and need to balance work and school. One youth reflected on how starting to work at an early age benefited her greatly, as she was able to get a taste of and experience for the world of work, including how to navigate workplace conflict, prior to finishing post-secondary. However, another youth shared how difficult they found it to find work as a high school student, as jobs that in the past often hired high schoolers, no longer seem to be hiring them.

“I think getting a job at an early age was really an important milestone. It was honestly out of necessity, but I think it was important because it taught me how to work with people and it’s very obvious now that I’m older and I’m seeing how other folks move around in the world, it really shows when people don’t have work experience. So, I feel very grateful to have worked for like 7, 8 years before actually graduating from university, because by then I knew how to deal with workplace conflict, how to file my taxes, I knew so many things that I wouldn’t have known if I didn’t enter the workforce as early as I did.”

The majority of youth narrated how the careers they pursue can change over time based on multiple factors. Their **decision-making** around careers was described in a myriad of ways. Multiple youth shared that they started to make different choices as they grew older and began to see the realities of work, and relatedly, learned about where and how they want to spend their own energy to meet their goals, including what they want their work days to look like and how long they want to spend in school.

Some youth talked about the impact of financial considerations on their choices, such as not wanting to be financially worried themselves, and pursuing a path that enables them to be able to take care of family members financially. Some youth also spoke of family pressure and wanting to appease their families with their choices.

One youth reflected on how a paid internship role they took right out of post-secondary in an Indigenous community greatly shifted the work that she would like to do, as she realized she would like to do more socially impactful work. Exposure to new experiences can cause youth to re-think their paths.

Career decision-making self-efficacy (CDMSE) refers to a belief in one's ability to successfully complete tasks necessary to making effective career decisions. It can include skills such as obtaining relevant information, planning, and problem-solving.

Seventy-one per cent of racialized youth report high levels of career decision-making self-efficacy. The top CDMSE skills reported by racialized youth include the skills to choose a career that fits their interests and abilities (87 per cent) and switching how they communicate based on the environment (e.g., professional vs casual; 85 per cent).

(Finding from national survey with n=1618 racialized youth)

Another youth working in a performing arts field spoke of how the industry is built for a particular standard (i.e., white, tall, skinny). She experienced a tension between accepting that the industry will never cater to her, or staying in the industry and trying to push the boundaries of who the industry is for.

A few youth reflected on how it is important to take time to decide the path you would like to pursue when there is uncertainty, but recognized that taking this time is also a financial privilege that many youth may not have. One respondent who resides in Quebec reflected on how the CEGEP system allows students to try out

different paths without the financial pressure of university. However, when she did decide to attend university, this came with more pressure as she was the first in her family to do so, and not being totally settled on her path continues to worry her.

"I took a couple years off of school just because to me, university was such a gift. My mom never went to university, you know? I don't want to waste it. I don't know what I want to do with it yet and I was terrified of wasting this opportunity. I know I can do it financially. I know I can do it academically, I just don't know what I want to do. It was like a very big stressor in my life. I think the pressure of being the first one in my family to go to university was so hard because to me was such a gift. I didn't know what I want to do with it and I didn't want to waste it and it's still to this day my biggest struggle."

Youth who had completed some form of post-secondary at the time of the interview discussed different ways that they have **engaged in their job searches**. They described how their job searches have involved multiple approaches, such as hearing about positions through their networks of friends and former coworkers, internships, and volunteering. Some youth had mixed feelings about the fairness of unpaid internships and volunteering.

"I think that it's fine to volunteer, but I feel like right now I am not in a position where I could be doing things for free. They want me to do trainings and things like that online, about things that I've already [done] in school. These trainings are like six hours of my time, which I'm not being compensated for,

which I could be using to look for a job or taking on a work shift or something. I'm kind of tired of doing free labour."

Other youth spoke of the difficulty of finding full-time jobs and taking precarious paid work (e.g., short-term contract work) to 'get their foot in the door,' which often only leads to more precarious work. Another youth who has been employed long-term at an organization, noted that due to impacts of the pandemic, her organization has recently needed to re-structure, and her position has become more precarious than it previously was.

“I’m also a recent graduate. I’m in that stage where I’m just trying to find jobs. I’ve been working a bunch of contract jobs, so I haven’t really had a chance to experience what a full-time job is. So I did a bunch of roles.... And I also did a bit of mentorship, like volunteering. And also like a teaching role.

Other youth spoke of how trying to make connections through LinkedIn or employment agencies often does not pan out. One youth shared an experience of taking part in an employment placement program, but her experience demonstrates a lack of supports that such programs have for racialized youth who encounter racism in the workplace and/or lack a way to make sure that they are matching racialized youth with employers who are safe:

“I was with [community-based program] at one point and there’s this [employment-matching] program. When they put me in the job, like, I was not treated very well, I actually experienced racism working there. They were like trying to dangle the idea that I would be hired full-time after five months. And then they made-up some ridiculous argument with me - it’s like they were trying to provoke me or something. And then I never got hired....I don’t know what they told [community-based program]. So that was a really terrible and traumatic experience for me personally. I didn’t feel like I got much advocacy either from [community-based program].”

For many youth, the difference between a supportive and unsupportive work environment was whether or not they had a **supportive manager**. One youth narrated the impact that a supportive and strategic manager has had on her and on planning her career trajectory:

“Not only is [my manager] thinking about what I could do now in my role, he was already thinking about in the future, like in two years time, what would [I] need to go to the next level. In five years time, what would put [me] in that position where [I’m] ready for more supervisory stuff. I’ve never really had that in like any role. I’m mostly just [a] listener. But I guess in this case, ‘cause I made it clear when I started that professional development was important

thing for me, I think he was receptive to that and actually giving me concrete advice. It's not just like, 'maybe you should do this, maybe you should do that.' It's very much 'you should be able to do this with[in] this timeline.'"

Other youth highlighted the difference that supportive managers made to their work experiences and work trajectories, in particular when they are dealing with mental health challenges; the importance of relationship building for career paths; and how gaining confidence over time enables youth to ask for the support that they need.

"As you do one experience and then you've gained a bit more confidence about your skills and maybe what you can bring to the table, you kind of learn better how to navigate or ask for advice or support from people that you may not know, like your managers at work. So I think now I'm a bit more confident in being able to like ask for advice, ask for support and say my opinion."

What Racialized Youth May Want Help With

The priorities, issues, and circumstances from youths' narratives offer insights into the ways that mentors could potentially support BIPOC youth. Youth talked about a range of challenges they face, including mental health and learning differences; intergenerational trauma stemming from racism and colonialism; navigating predominantly white educational institutions and workplaces, including encountering racism; and experiences of being othered, which can lead to feelings of non-belonging and isolation.

"I have an interesting relationship with working sometimes because I do have a generalized anxiety disorder, so sometimes I get really hard on myself, so it's really hard sometimes for me to keep a job. But I've been working on that and going to therapy and being home again kind of let me reset and work on that."

“That isolation feeling of like not really belonging, I think definitely has contributed to feelings of depression.”

Newcomer youth, and Canadian born youth with newcomer parents, talked about specific challenges in learning to navigate Canadian systems and job market. Indigenous youth shared their experiences of attempted erasure of Indigenous identities and knowledge by the settler state, including the impact of residential schools, suggesting the value that cultural mentorship could have.

Youth also discussed the importance of personal relationships with friends, family, and partners, suggesting that mentorship could support youth by strengthening their socio-emotional skills, such as self-empathy, advocacy, love, trust and

confidence.

Navigating Times of Transition

Youth generally shared that they struggled during transition periods. Support from mentors could be particularly helpful during these times of transition. These include macro transitions, such as the end of high school, applying for and starting post-secondary education, and entering the labour market. Opportunities to provide support also exist during what we term as micro transitions, including changing a major/program of study, changing jobs, or getting a promotion. Mentorship may also be helpful for youth when they are going through these transitions for the first time as a young person, which can lead to stress.

While youth face societal-wide issues that mentors may not be able to address directly, like un/underemployment and unaffordable housing, they could provide support to individual youth in their job searches, as well as advocate with and on behalf of youth for changes to policies that would help with these challenges (e.g., universal income, credential recognition, and affordable housing advocacy). **Many youth expressed the feeling that they need to solve everything on their own or face challenges without supports. Mentorship can be a way of showing youth that they deserve support.**

Many of the key transitions that emerged in youth narratives, where mentorship could provide support, pertained to **educational transitions**, including end of high school, choosing a program of study, applying for post-secondary, selecting courses, and starting post-secondary.

“Grade 11 or 10, that’s when it started to get like, really stressful for me because of university admissions. And also, just like, just personal stuff. But a lot of it was because I was also really busy just studying all the time.”

These educational transitions coincide with youth’s **personal transitions**, such as moving away from home, and learning to manage their finances and time on their own. Youth talked about facing challenges during these periods, which a mentor could help support them through.

“[University] was very different from what I expected to be. I struggled a lot during my first and second year, with pretty much everything. I had too much like freedom, no restrictions... I waited until the last moment to study for exams... In terms of academics, I was not prepared at all.”

“I did well in university, though it was difficult. I think I struggled just balancing a lot of things at that point in my life, both because of family things and then just growing up in your early kind of adulthood... I was working and

Racialized youth who immigrated to Canada (n=875) are more likely to have very good or excellent mental health compared to racialized youth who are born in Canada, after controlling for gender, age, and community type*.

(Finding from national survey with n=1618 racialized youth)

Statistics accompanied by an asterisk (*) throughout the report are statistically significant, with at least 95 percent confidence.

I also lived alone, I lived with my sister as well, and so paying rent and working and trying to excel in university was kind of a lot for me to handle.”

Career transitions also featured prominently in youth’s stories. These include entering the labour market for the first time out of post-secondary, deciding on a career path, trajectory and goals; managing industry precarity and job layoffs; and seeking promotion and career advancement. One youth also discussed entering the workforce again after being released from incarceration. Mentorship could be particularly impactful during these career transitions.

Complementing Other Sources of Support in Youth’s Lives

“I think support can come in many different forms and it’s needed in many different aspects of life.”

Youth’s stories show that they have multiple sources of support in their lives. Mentorship can be seen as a complement alongside these existing supports. As noted above, many youth discussed supportive **teachers** who impacted their educational experiences and supportive **managers** who impacted their work experiences.

Multiple youth also noted that an important source of support for them is therapy or **other mental health supports**, echoing the value that youth place on taking care of their mental health, but also the impact that racist systems and racism have on youth’s well being. Some youth talked about needing support for social anxiety, generalized anxiety disorder, and PTSD. However, others noted that cost can be a barrier in accessing mental health supports.

“Sometimes it would be the decision between groceries for the week or going to therapy sessions.”

Youth shared that being in community with other racialized youth is important.

Friendships were a key source of support for youth, particularly during transition points such as moving to post-secondary education. Many youth noted that they rely on friends who are already in fields of interest or who have already made the transition to post-secondary, to provide advice about applying to post-secondary, navigating post-secondary, putting a resume together, and what scholarships to apply for.

“When I was unsure about like school, I had friends that helped me out with choosing where to go and making the right decisions.”

Youth who immigrated to Canada as children/young adults also noted that they rely on friends to help them navigate secondary and post-secondary, particularly when their parents could not offer certain types of support. For example, one youth shared that they had a friend who spoke their language but was born in Canada and they helped him learn how to interact with groups of racially diverse people, which was a new experience for him. Another youth who immigrated relied heavily on friends who had immigrated earlier to help guide her through applying to post-secondary and the English competency exam process, particularly as everyone in her family was also a newcomer.

Canadian born youth having lower mental health outcomes than newcomers is echoed in the literature (e.g., Banerjee et al., 2024). Canadian born racialized youth may have expectations of receiving better treatment in systems and institutions by nature of their birth, but then when this does not materialize, it can impact their sense of belonging. This may also signal a gap in programming that mentoring programs can address. **While there are programs for newcomer youth, there are fewer programs targeted at Canadian born racialized youth.**

“My friends were giving me advice, like what subjects you need to do well in and even having to take the English competency exam so that you could be qualified for a university. Like, one of my older friends who was already in university by that point was just like letting me know, like an IELTS versus a TOEFL, like which one would be better fit for you? Yeah, so I have that to kind of...make me understand what the process is. My parents really have no idea. We were all kind of like new. And my aunt, she was like the family that sponsored us to come here, she also was just like not aware.”

Familial supports were highlighted by youth as key source of support. A few youth named **extended family**, such as cousins, as people who they felt supported by. One youth shared that his post-secondary education was funded by his uncle, however this also came with strings as the uncle wanted him to pursue a particular career path. Multiple youth named **siblings** – in particular older sisters

– as people who they felt they could go to for advice and help making decisions.

“[My older sister] has always kind of been someone who wanted to make sure that I’m doing the best thing for me instead of what everybody else says to me... She’s a very reasonable and a very calm person... So her word means a lot to me...like her word is kind of loud to me. Like if she says something’s not good or not smart to do then I’m not going to do it.

Support from Parents

Parents were also highlighted as sources of support. One youth shared how her mother’s influence of focusing on school helped her stay on a good path.

“One key decision that brought me to where I am today would be just focusing on school. I think there was a lot of opportunity to be led astray and I think my mom’s emphasis on doing well in school, and the kind of drive, the expectation I had for myself, just deciding to stick to school and not stray from school was very big for me.”

Youth with parents who were familiar with the Canadian post-secondary system because of their own education or work were able to provide youth with guidance.

“I think [my mom has] been a mentor to other people, so it feels like I’ve always had that guidance from her that I feel like a lot of people don’t get from their parents ‘cause obviously, you know, a lot of people’s parents help them the best they can. But with some of the connections and information that my mom knows, it often feels like she could help me in it from, like, different angles.”

Notably, the majority of youth who had newcomer parents, shared that their parents had few expectations about what educational or career path they wanted youth to pursue.

“I applied for university without like, you know, really consulting parents.... They were like, you know, you can do whatever you want and you know, apply as

Newcomer parents may struggle with limited insider knowledge, or social or cultural capital, which helps to effectively guide their children as they make educational and career decisions. In some cases, youth may feel free to pursue their own career path of interest. However, youth may also feel adrift as first-generation learners without parental guidance. Their experiences may mirror their parents’ own experiences of being adrift in the Canadian system. Notably, this may stand in contrast to the usual perception (and stereotype) that newcomer families have very particular ideas about the professional career paths they would like their children to take.

More than half (58 per cent) of racialized youth were encouraged by their family to consider various education/career paths and make their own decisions, while 26 per cent reported that they were expected to follow a specific education/career path that their family had in mind for them (compared to 17 per cent of white youth). The remaining 16 per cent of racialized youth said that their family did not talk to them much about education or career paths (20 per cent for white youth).

Immigrant racialized youth are slightly more likely than racialized youth born in Canada to be encouraged by their family to consider various education/career paths and make their own decisions (61 per cent compared to 55 per cent).

(Finding from national survey with n=1618 racialized youth and n=1492 white youth)

long as it's, you know, within home distance. You can do what you want. And I was like, OK, with that as well. But I feel like a little bit more guidance or someone kind of like asking like you know like giving me options and then like I would like narrow them down. I feel like that would have been more helpful to me

Both my parents, they always say like, it doesn't matter something like, 'I just want to know you try your best' and stuff like that. So, I think for me, there was actually no pressure at all to do hard work. But then at the same time it's like there's no, there's no rules or anything. So then I just like try my best

I think university is hard on its own, but I think it's like extra hard if like you are first in your family to go to Canadian university. I think it

was both like a blessing and a challenge.”

“One I had like no expectations, my parents had no expectations. They were a little disappointed that I went to [University] ‘cause you know [they were like] ‘what’s the point?’

These approaches may speak to how newcomer parents have struggled to find meaningful work themselves in the Canadian system, in part due to their undervalued credentials. One youth expressed feeling an obligation to in turn support her mother due to the struggles that she has endured, as a newcomer and as a single mother.

“When you move from another country your academic accolades and your degrees don't necessarily translate. So my mother used to be an ESL teacher, she used to work for the airlines, but that didn't matter when she moved to Canada. So she had to kind of find a job and start from the beginning.”

Racialized Youth's Experiences with Mentorship

Defining Mentorship

When asked to define mentorship, most youth defined it in relation to **career or professional pathways**.

"A mentor is someone who is doing something that a mentee wants to achieve, or the mentor has gone through some experiences and achieved certain things that the mentee is hoping to achieve, and the mentor uses their experiences and knowledge and connections and resources to help the mentee to achieve their individual goals and to support them through their individual journey."

"A mentor is someone who can open doors for you as well as someone who can connect you to the right opportunities."

"I think like a mentor is someone that really asks us the questions and helps us think about what we should do."

However, some youth had a more **holistic view** of mentorship, sharing that mentoring can also relate to hobbies, other personal goals, mental health and emotional support.

"I think there's other parts outside of [career supports] that, for example like, new goals that I want to reach in my life that aren't just career oriented. Like if I have like a hobby that I want to attack or something that I don't feel the confidence to do, maybe someone can help me with that."

"My definition of mentoring is actually when you have someone that is always there for you that you actually go to when you need physical, mental or spiritual or emotional support when you actually need someone to talk to, someone to advise, someone to teach you things that you think you are lacking."

Qualities of a Good Mentor

When reflecting on what makes a good mentor, youth described having a mentor who is consistent and shows up; who you can look up to; who is on your team; who helps you discover or unlock your potential/what is already there; who does not impose their perspectives on you; who offers advice and support based on their lived experiences; who guides you/helps you navigate; who is an open communicator and listener; who has a stake in your well-being and success; and who is committed to continue the mentoring relationship long-term.

“People who are gentle-spirited, nonjudgmental, let you take your own path....Like sort of just trusting that you’re the expert of your own experience and what your goals are. But also being considerate of people’s goals and working together on them...even just like spending time with people.”

Another participant reflected on the characteristics of one of her mentors, with whom she had a successful relationship.

“In terms of being a successful mentor, I think she was really good at understanding what my goals were and rather than imposing like her ideas or goals, she would always listen to what I wanted to do, talk through all of my options and help me come to a conclusion as to what I should do next.”

Youth described building mutual trust with good mentors over time, which happened when mentors got to know them, remembered details about their lives, validated their experiences, checked in regularly, and were responsive and communicative.

“Just showing up is really important for me.

“Make an effort to get to know me and like my personality rather than like assumptions and stuff.

“They ask for details to try to figure out what’s going on so they can give better advice or help. But they don’t invalidate my experience.

Mentor-Mentee Match

Among racialized youth who have not experienced mentorship, 82 per cent report being interested in having a mentor. For these youth (n=517), the characteristics of a potential mentor that matter the most are the mentor’s education or career interests and their lived experience.

“I think it’s important that a good mentor is someone who can relate to you in some capacity.”

Youth shared nuanced insights into the importance of mentors’ personal characteristics, including aspects of identity. It was clear that there is no one-size-fits-all approach when it comes to mentor-mentee matching. Youth expressed openness to being mentored by a variety of different people, not necessarily

Shared professional interests and lived experiences are important identity markers of ideal mentors for racialized youth

43%
Education or career interests

42%
Lived experiences

30%
Age/generation

21%
Racial identity

19%
Spiritual or religious background

19%
Language

15%
Gender identity

11%
Ethnocultural background

7%
Sexual orientation

6%
Newcomer background

5%
Disability experience

3%
Shared characteristics not important

Racialized youth without mentorship experience (n=517) largely report wanting a mentor to help them develop skills including adaptability, communication, and problem-solving. Encouragingly, these are the same skills that those youth with mentorship experience (n=687) say that their mentor did indeed help them with. Although less commonly reported, racialized youth are slightly more likely than white youth to want mentors to help them develop digital skills (77 per cent of racialized youth without mentoring experience compared to 65 per cent of white youth without mentoring experience).

(Finding from national survey with n=1618 racialized youth and n=1492 white youth)

just people with whom they share identity characteristics. Youth said that mentors with diverse characteristics and experiences are useful for different types of support. This reinforces the concept of mentorships – youth need multiple mentors – and that youth choice is key.

“With general mentorship...it’d be open to more [career] areas that I wanted, but with like the Black mentorship it’d be like more narrow to like my needs I guess.”

‘Racial-matching’ mentorship could be a bridge to accessing other forms of mentorship for BIPOC youth. Youth shared that the importance of shared racial and/or cultural background depends on the type of mentorship BIPOC youth are looking for, whereas shared career interest, and to a lesser extent, shared gender identity, seemed important across most forms of mentorship. ‘Racially-matched’ mentorship may be important to help youth figure out how to navigate structural issues like systemic racism in white institutions, but may not be needed for all career-focused mentoring.

Shared Understanding & Trust

The benefits of racially-matched mentoring include the potential for more initial trust and perhaps a shared understanding between mentees and mentors, creating a more comfortable and safer environment for mentees. Youth expressed similar thoughts around ethno-cultural mentee-mentor matching. One

youth spoke of how meeting fellow Filipinos in the same field helped him feel more comfortable asking questions about his field and starting to engage with mentoring relationships. This same youth also reflected that rather than needing to be a ‘racial match’, just having a BIPOC mentor could also be beneficial, as it is often easier to build trust with BIPOC people.

“The majority of our student body and professors and advisors, they’re predominantly white and I’m Filipino. I just find it like harder to seek help from other people that aren’t Filipino, if that makes sense, because they’re nice and willing to help but I just feel like if you talk to someone that’s in the same field as you and they’re also Filipino, they understand where you’re coming from at a different level. That’s why when I went to [program event] it was just so cool to see so many Filipinos that are in similar positions or similar fields that I am. I think that’s my first interaction with mentorship.”

“I think sometimes it’s like easier to build trust with other BIPOC people because they understand where you’re coming from and there’s one less extra step when you talk to them because most of them come from immigrant families or they’ve experienced the same experiences that you have, so I feel like it’s easier.”

Similarly, other youth reflected that the benefit of being mentored by someone with either similar racial or ethno-cultural identities means that you can show your true self.

“You don’t have to like, mask as much with somebody who just gets it, you know?”

“Some people are racist, so you kind of have your guard up. So maybe you don’t feel like you can share your authentic self or like go all the way. I think that could be a potential barrier between a white mentor.”

Having a BIPOC mentor may also mean not needing to ‘educate’ a white mentor about racialized lived experiences: the mentee would not need to take on the emotional labour of educating a white mentor about living as racialized in a white dominant society.

“I think a white mentor might not be able to, well, I know that they probably wouldn’t be able to understand on the same level that a BIPOC one would, because there are so many different experiences and like roadblocks on a path for me than it would be for a white mentor. So I don’t think they could offer the same guidance because there’s really no chance that our path to

success would look similar or the same at all. So coming from a BIPOC mentor, that would be a lot more helpful. So I actually understand how they climbed over roadblocks or like obstacles.”

In a similar vein, another youth reflected that white mentors may overlook things that may be barriers for BIPOC youth, as they themselves did not encounter those same barriers, as a white person.

“ [Having a BIPOC mentor] I don’t think it’s like crucial, but I do think that it’s helpful. It definitely like helps you connect with people more. And although like my [profession] mentor, she is white and like she still gives me really good insight. But I feel like sometimes it’s just like a different experience or like they might just like, overlook things that maybe might be a barrier for you

Further, youth shared that it may be important to have a mentor with the same racial or ethno-cultural background as them, as it helps them to see what is possible for their futures.

“ I think it is [important to have a mentor with the same cultural or racial background] because I think that it’s really helpful to see kind of a reflection of yourself in what you would like [to] see as success. You know what I mean? So if you’re seeing someone successful who you look up to, who is like yourself, it kind of helps you I guess, see yourself becoming that one day

Communities are Heterogeneous

However, youth also reflected on how it should not be automatically assumed that because a mentor has a shared racial and/or ethno-cultural identity with their mentee, that they would be a good mentor. One youth reflected on her experience with a mentor who had a similar racial and ethno-cultural background, while noting the importance of other mentor characteristics as well.

“I guess it made me feel more safe to talk to her because we come from the same [or] like similar backgrounds. Yeah. And I guess like because we came from the same similar background, I feel like his advice was maybe more suited to me... Personally, I don’t think like a good mentor should be only be based on being the same background as you, there could be bad mentors who have the same backgrounds as you. It’s sometimes it’s just nice to see that like... I wouldn’t only join [a mentoring relationship] because we have the same background, although that is kind of important, it’s not super important to me. Like I’d look more for their successes and achievements in their field.”

Another youth whose mentor did not share her cultural or racial background also highlighted how there were other characteristics that led to their match.

"I don't feel like it's a big issue if you match with someone who's not from your culture... I would definitely still be open to someone with a different background. I mean just because they look like me doesn't mean they're the best person for me, like and again, that the survey that we took kind of demonstrated that - like there was a lot of mentors that looked like me as well. But I wasn't matched with them, so there was something within my mentor that matched with what my data showed."

Further, some youth expressed needing to keep firm boundaries between their career and their cultural expressions. One Indigenous youth powerfully shared that her cultural experiences are for herself and her community, alone.

"I need connection with my culture. Like I really do and I crave it all the time. But I can get that in my free time. I can get that when I'm at home, I can get that when I'm in my community...I want to focus on having my cultural experiences be for myself and not for my career."

Thus, for youth a shared racial or cultural identity is not necessary, but perhaps an added benefit in a good mentoring relationship. Further, presuming that a 'racially-matched' mentor relationship is the best or only type of mentorship that youth want or need oversimplifies racialized youth's identities and dynamics within BIPOC communities, and positions communities as static and homogeneous, when in reality they are heterogenous, everchanging and contain multiplicities and pluralities. Multiple youth highlighted that stigmatization and lateral violence exist within their communities, including with regard to class or socio-economic status, as well as around mental health diagnoses.

"I am a person who identifies as having a mental health diagnosis and sometimes, if I'm connected with someone who [is] the same race as me... they might say things that are like stigmatizing, and [they may feel more comfortable saying that to me] because we're both the same race"

Profession & Connection

Overall, shared racial or ethno-cultural identity was highlighted by youth as a bonus for mentoring relationships that are career focused. Instead, for many youth the most important characteristic that mentors and mentees share is their professional interest, as well as a sense of connection. At the same time, one

youth highlighted that only focusing on profession for mentor-mentee matching could also be problematic, and that it is essential to match based on what both the mentor and mentee want to get out of the relationship.

"I don't think [mentor of the same race is] necessary, but I think it is beneficial if there is overlap in certain things, whether that is bit like culturally or more experiential."

"[On choosing a mentor] I think the first characteristics [to consider] would actually be is the person in line with my work?"

"It's just how I connect with [a mentor] too... it really is about the vibe."

"[Matching] should just be based on the outcomes and what you're hoping for in the mentoring relationships versus just focusing on your profession because like I would love to get paired up with somebody who was like nothing at all like me."

Shared Values & Lived Experiences

Youth want mentors with experiential knowledge and expertise in their fields of interest, as well as shared values and outlooks (e.g., family oriented or social justice), and shared lived experiences. Lived experiences do not necessarily equate to shared race or culture. Echoing others, one youth stated that sharing a background does not mean that lived experiences, outlooks or values are the same.

"Like in maybe in certain circumstances or situations, [racial matching] may be helpful, but I think like the mentor I got, I think her and I share very similar values and I think that's the most important thing in making our relationship - a mentoring relationship - to be successful because you know, people from the same background could have very different values and very different outlook on things and very different life experiences. Just because, you know, someone is from the same background as me doesn't mean that they also have lived sort of similar experiences as me. But my mentor and I have similar lived experiences, but also very similar values and I think that was like one of the main things that helped us to connect and stay in touch even after the formal program ended."

Another youth narrated how a shared experience of being medical students as well as having parents who immigrated to Canada is what helped to create a bond with her mentor.

"We did bond on the fact that she and I were both like the first in our families to be interested in medicine and apply to medicine. She understood a lot of the challenges that I was experiencing and the lack of information and resources that I felt I didn't have access to because it was just so new to me."

So, she understood a lot of those things and helped me to overcome those barriers...I think that she also had very similar values as me because her parents also immigrated to Canada, my parents immigrated to Canada, so we really understood the immigrant experience.”

Youth tended to agree that perhaps instead of having a mentor of the same racial background, it is rather that mentees who are newcomers themselves or who have parents who immigrated may benefit from a mentor who also has similar experiences. However, this type of match was only described as important for certain types of mentorship, and not necessarily career-focused mentorship.

“I think in some circumstances like it could help [to have a mentor with a shared racial background] if it’s a certain type of mentorship, like if it’s for example like informal mentorships where [the mentee is] struggling to maybe find their place as an immigrant or something. I think in that type of setting shared experiences would really help understand each other’s perspectives. But I think overall it’s not very necessary, especially because a good mentor could also connect you with other people who might share your experiences.”

Intersections of Gender & Class

Youth shared that having a BIPOC or racially-matched mentor, as well as a gender-matched mentor could help them shore up their resistance capital. Such matches would enable them to get an idea of barriers that they may encounter in the workplace and out in the world in general, and how to navigate those barriers.

“As an adult, what I look for is mentorship from racialized individuals, because as an adult now, you start to realize things, right? You realize how many folks are racialized in senior positions. You realize different things that make you want to get mentorship from people who look like you, both from a like a gender perspective and also racialized perspective...I’m starting to think about me being a racialized Indian person, as I’m meeting brilliant Indian women in my space. I’m trying to build relationships with them so I can understand their experience and hopefully get tips from them. If life has treated them differently because of their skin colour, or where they’re from as well.”

One youth emphasized the importance of a gender-matched mentor, as she is pursuing a career in a predominantly male field. She finds that men have a hard time grasping what that context is like for her when she tries to explain it to them, which also requires her emotional labour.

"I think for me it would be a little different. I think just because I know our experiences would be different based on like how it is for example like if I go into a corporate setting I know that most of the executives would be like white and male. So it would be hard I think to have them sympathise to my experiences or understand or like be as interested as I think all of my mentors pretty much have been like female. And it helps, especially being in like STEM...cause they understand sort of the struggles and I don't have to explain the whole thing versus I think if I had 'cause I if even if I just talk to people on like a daily day-to-day basis like friends and things like that it's hard for them to understand like if they're a male like what the context is, I kind of have to go in depth about that."

One youth also highlighted how a gender match has been important for her in mentoring relationships, but also having mentors who are of differing socio-economic classes, as this has exposed her to a range of people and has helped her to navigate new spaces that she previously had not had access to. However, this youth also reflected that she would ideally like to have a mentor with a shared racial and ethno-cultural identity.

"My family is working class and like the two mentors that I had actually are probably like middle to upper middle class. I know this because they would invite me to like non-work related things and just the environment was different and I feel like I got exposed to different people through that. And like almost learned how to, you know, navigate those spaces. I don't think anything about our background ever came into play when it came to asking how I could you know, move up in whatever ways, especially with those two mentors anyway, like the one was a [job profession]. So he wasn't going to be like, 'oh, yeah, like, it doesn't matter that you're like a woman of color and you're young' or whatever. Like he was very aware of the social like, how my social background, my socio-economic-whatever background, would affect some prospects or how I would be perceived. And then my other mentor actually, even though she wasn't Filipino, she was a woman. And so she understood a lot of the challenges that came with, you know, trying to work in different, public and private, even nonprofit sectors. And just like you know, being mansplained to and whatever. Like we really bonded over that. And she was like, well, this is how I navigated that. So I think those things were relevant for me and I related to them a lot. But I have always wanted a Filipino mentor like that would be my dream. Yeah, that would just be amazing."

While racial or ethno-cultural matching is not necessary for career-focused mentorship, youth do face the reality that many workplaces and fields continue to be predominantly white and male. One youth echoed how these spaces would lead one to desire a mentor with a shared gender and racial identity.

How Mentors Can Support BIPOC Youth

BIPOC youth are navigating the reality of the workplace, as well as the reality that their mentors may be white and not have a lived understanding of being racialized in white dominant society. Youth shared different ways that white mentors or mentors who they do not share other identities with (i.e., gender and class) can build trust with them and what they can offer them as BIPOC youth. First, youth emphasized the importance of mentors being willing to listen, learn, and be supportive of their experiences. It is vital for mentors not to question or invalidate mentees' experiences: youth are the experts on their own lived experiences.

“I had one mentor. She was like a few years older than me and she was from a different background, like cultural background and I think what made me trust her pretty easily, too, is that she’s, like, really willing to listen and kind of like pretty supportive

“It’s obviously easier to build a trust with a Filipino person because there’s just so much that like, right off the bat, they understand where you’re coming from. And your background – usually, they come from an immigrant family, like their parents are immigrants. And I feel with a white person [or] around white people too – when I went to elementary [school] I was the only Filipino kid. There’s always an extra step when building trust with white people. Like, I feel when you talk to them, you have to put on like a different face I guess. Or like, act more white. But like it also depends on the person, because normally people are nice and stuff. But I just find it harder to build trust sometimes. I feel like I always have to explain myself or like explain this and that or like explain [why] my family does this [or that]. But yeah, as long as they’re like willing to listen and learn about where you come from. I feel like that’s not a problem.”

Further, youth talked about the importance of mentors practicing cultural humility (the notion that one can never truly achieve competence in a culture and it is a lifelong learning process) when learning about others. Knowing that mentors share a framework of decolonization can create a safer space for BIPOC youth.

“I think that for mentorship the person could really honestly be of any race. I could see how possibly if someone is not culturally competent, how that could be an issue

“I think I’m open to now be mentored by other women who have similar practices or similar interests, but also still I think, feel safe and I think if they’re not Black or not, women of colour, if they’re not Black and if they are women of colour or like white women, I think there needs to be like a central theme of decolonization or them just I think learning or knowing how to be

safe space, even though you can always be a safe space. But there needs to be, I think themes that are central to both of our work. But I think now I'm open to not always being mentored by people who look like me, as I think it's also interesting to be, well, not interesting, but good to be well-rounded and learn different things even though you can still be well-rounded like in your community."

One youth specifically shared that her mentor was aware of and willing to use her privilege and social/cultural capital to provide access and connections to her as a mentee.

"[My mentor] is not BIPOC. And she's from a more of a privileged position. And I think she recognises that as well. I would say she uses her privilege to help me too with reaching out to people that she knows that can help me in my field"

Racialized Youth's Mentoring Priorities

BIPOC youth shared what they want and value from a mentor and/or a mentoring program. The vast majority of youth highlighted **career path guidance** as a key mentoring priority. They were most interested in mentoring from someone in the same field of work, who could share expertise about the job market in that field, and offer job search support and guidance.

"Looking back at my journey, I think, yeah, a mentor would have actually helped me in making a fast decision about what I'm actually going to be doing after high school like, am I going for engineering or architecture? Because it took me a long time to process that."

Youth tended to conceptualize and emphasize mentoring as a career resource, especially during times of career transition. Other career related priorities identified included time management and organizational skills, as well as work life balance.

Most racialized youth are interested in mentoring. Among those surveyed, only 19 per cent of racialized youth without mentoring experience have no interest in having a mentor (compared to 28 per cent of white youth without mentoring experience).

Among racialized youth with no interest in having a mentor (n=119), more than half (52 per cent) report preferring to solve problems on their own. However, among white youth with no interest in having a mentor (n=187), the most common reason reported is because they are doing fine and do not feel they need a mentor (41 per cent, compared to 27 per cent of racialized youth).

(Finding from national survey with n=1618 racialized youth and n=1492 white youth)

“As soon as I started working, post-graduation, I would have benefited from a mentor to help me with my career trajectory, having a consistent, successful person in my life to help me get on a good track.”

“[I want] someone who understands like sort of my struggle right now, like choosing between something that I feel like might have more impact versus like working in a corporate world where I might feel like I’m not doing much. Like someone who understands that struggle that I feel like I don’t have too many people in my circle right now who are in a similar boat”

“I’ve wanted to either switch positions or like when I have gotten new positions and I’m like it’s kind of scary. Like there’s so many people that are intimidating. Sometimes I just need like that reassurance from my mentors. But yeah, usually it’s like in a time of change where I’m like, I really need like mentors right now.”

Among racialized youth who are interested in mentorship but have not had a mentor, those whose parents have a high school education or below are slightly more likely to report wanting a mentor to help them develop critical social capital skills compared to those whose parents have a post-secondary degree or diploma.

(Finding from national survey with n=1618 racialized youth and n=1492 white youth)

There was overall less preference/focus on personal mentoring, with many youth saying they felt they could get personal support from friends or family. However, they also recognized that over time a career-focused mentoring relationship may develop into further well-rounded support, and a good mentor may offer some personal support too.

“I feel like mentorship really helps a lot with the professional aspect. And if you’re lucky enough to have a good relationship with each other, then it develops more [personal]”

“I would only ever get a mentor for my career...maybe I’ll have a life coach like a mentorship life coach down the line, but it’s not something that I would like for myself right now.”

“If I had more career academic related questions, I would go towards mentors and upper year students. If I have more personal issues, then I may turn more towards my family or close friends.”

However, some youth did note that they were interested in **socio-emotional support**. They sought someone with whom they could have a connection and have as a sounding board. At times support is viewed as less about wanting help and more about wanting connection, support and validation, especially if this was something lacking in youths’ relationships with friends or family.

"I think it would be nice to have someone to like talk to more about just like personal things. I don't think I'm the best at that. And then my family also doesn't really do that at all. So I think it would be good for me to have that."

Other aspects of their lives where some youth felt that they could benefit from mentoring relationships – perhaps with a peer – included accessing mental health resources, navigating familial expectations or pressure (e.g., intergenerational conflicts and differential cultural expectations related to context), as well as modeling healthy relationships. Notably, youth were careful to distinguish mentoring from therapy.

"I feel like getting those connections back and like keeping those conversations going is definitely also helpful [with a mentor]. Like having like consistent conversations with someone. That kind of sounds like therapy, but it's not... I'm kind of like shifting it from therapy. It's more actually like connecting and performing healthy relationships, I guess."

Some youth pushed back on mentors being too 'casual,' and sought more concrete answers and advice rather than a friendship, indicating that having **boundaries** in mentoring relationships is important.

"The mentor is not your therapist. It's nice if a mentor can give you personal advice, but I think there is a fine line, especially if it's mentorship through programming.... I make it a point to leverage [my mentor's] professional and academic expertise. And then also let him in on what's happening in my life. But I think it's also important to lean on your therapist, family and friends for those other things."

Other youth shared that **different mentors are needed for different aspects of their lives**, and that this **shifts over time**.

"It's just like trying to pick who to reach out to. Because I don't feel like I have one like catch all mentor who could like, you know, just answer every single question that I have."

I feel like it's good to have like, like two separate [mentors]. So like, I feel like a one-on-one mentorship program would be good just for like professional development and like career stuff. And then I feel like one that's more like racial[ly-based]. Yeah, I feel like I would benefit from both."

One youth shared that when she was younger she wanted emotional support, and now that she is older she is looking for more practical career supports. Another youth reflected that while mentorship will be important across her life, she also does not need mentorship in every aspect of her life.

“I don’t think there’s ever going to be a time that I don’t need a mentor. And I also don’t think that every aspect of my life needs mentorship.”

One Métis youth highlighted that she would like to receive **culturally-based mentorship**, in response to being asked what type of guidance or mentorship she needs, noting that she feels disconnected from some of her Indigenous family members because she lacks certain cultural knowledge.

Other forms of mentorship(s) that BIPOC youth highlighted included scholarships or other financial supports, and **navigating systemic racism in education systems**, such as being guided away from pursuing professional programs and career paths. One youth shared that BIPOC youth need to be exposed to opportunities that they were previously never given the chance to consider, and one way to do this could be through a mentoring program.

“Especially for, you know BIPOC, I think that like scholarships and stuff like that, funding for students could be really helpful, but I think that also for youth, especially programmes that allow us to experience things that we’ve never gotten the chance to, for example, like if there’s a group of students who are interested in science but who have constantly been told that they can’t pursue that maybe a program where they’re able to go in the labs and, you know, testing facility, stuff like that. I think that stuff like that could be really helpful. So just like opportunities.”

Relatedly, many youth shared that mentoring should provide opportunities such as **access and connections to networks** and other social capital building.

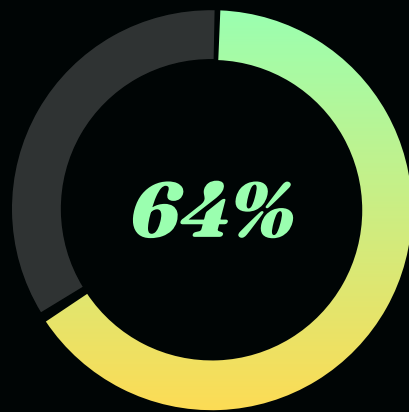
“I would want somebody who isn’t just like telling me what to do, but like putting me literally taking me to the doors that need to be open and unlocking them”

Multiple youth also saw mentoring as a venue through which they could further **develop skills**, be it technical skills like coding, hands on entrepreneurial skills, or

Racialized youth are slightly more likely to experience mentoring compared to white youth. Before age 18, 59 per cent of racialized youth and 52 per cent of white youth had at least one mentoring experience. About 64 per cent of racialized youth and 58 per cent of white youth had at least one mentoring experience in early adulthood (18+). Nonetheless, 36 – 41 per cent of racialized youth report no mentoring experiences growing up or in early adulthood (and 42 – 48 per cent of white youth).

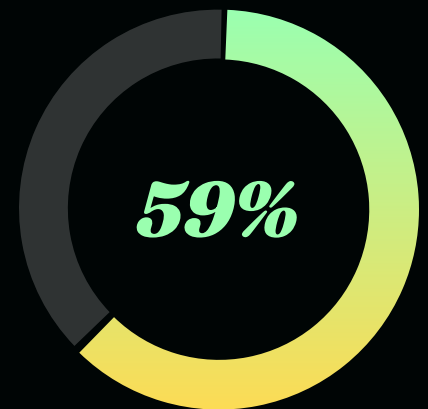
(Finding from national survey with n=1618 racialized youth and n=1492 white youth)

communication skills. But this was not a one-way street, as there could also be an exchange aspect to skill building.



Nearly two-thirds of racialized youth in Canada have had at least one person in their life they considered to be a mentor since turning 18

Nearly six in ten racialized youth in Canada had at least one person in their life they considered to be a mentor before turning 18



"I think having a mentor would actually be nice. So you can actually be double checking what you are doing when you're moving forward....I can be able to share my knowledge and skills and share my experience with the person."

Access to Mentoring

Connecting to a Mentor

Some of the youth who were interviewed had experience connecting with a mentor through formal programs (both mentoring and non-mentoring focused programs). These experiences included work-related mentorship programs (such as an entrepreneurship program, and a summer school program for the health sciences field with a mentorship component); mentoring programs specific to women and girls; post-secondary programs that matched new students with upper year mentors; academic advisors; programs through public libraries; employment

programs; and youth-focused programming at community centres.

“There was also this one youth program coordinator that for this program at a community centre I joined. Yeah, he was like there to basically listen to my problems and give me guidance when my parents and friends couldn’t. So that was like, really nice. He mainly gave me guidance on university, mainly from his failures and what he wished that he could have done if he were to do it all again.”

Almost all youth who were interviewed had experience receiving natural or informal mentorship from various people in their lives. These included former employers; teachers and professors; music teachers; sports coaches; older friends; and parents of friends and dating partners.

Some youth shared how it can be intimidating to approach natural or informal mentors, outside of a structured program. Some youth recalled specific instances when they asked someone directly to become a mentor, such as one youth who asked a previous boss to continue as her mentor.

“I already had an existing relationship with him and he was my boss. I just asked. I said ‘hey, I still feel like I have so much to learn from you and I don’t want this relationship, this professional relationship, to end. Can we stay in touch? Do you have the capacity to be my mentor?’ And he said yes. And then from there we talked logistics.”

Another youth shared that she takes building natural or informal mentoring relationships slowly, noting that it takes time to build mutual trust. She will start off by asking about the potential mentors’ career and for any advice that they would share.

“After spending several weeks working with someone, asking questions about their work and why they chose their specialty and, if they have any advice for me....I think it’s like asking for things slowly, and sort of building like a relationship and showing that they can trust you and you can trust them.”

Youth reflected on the places where they tend to spend time, which in turn could be places where they could potentially connect to a mentor. Outside of school and work, youth were connected to campus career centres, campus clubs, intramural sports teams, volunteer organizations, community and recreation centres, and libraries. Some youth also talked about spending time at the gym and the mall.

Social Media as a Way to Connect to Mentors

Social media was a space where some youth discussed connecting to mentoring

and other supports. One youth discussed drawing on YouTube videos to supplement her university courses.

“One thing that I think social media was really helpful for me was just YouTube, I think I learned like 90% of my first-year content from YouTube videos, because professors were just not doing it for me. So I was living off of YouTube videos. And those tutorials were amazing.”

One Indigenous youth credited a Black YouTuber in the UK with changing her life, as the YouTuber helped her to get ready for what to expect in post-secondary and to feel like university was something that could also be accessible to her. YouTube and other social media can be an avenue of sharing cultural capital (including across geographic contexts and racial lines), with social media figures acting as mentors, albeit in a para social manner.

“[YouTuber] shares very practical things about going to university [as a Black person] and also like going to a posh university. And it really, that’s genuinely the person who changed my life.”

Social media also serves a place where youth can find out about programs, with one youth describing how she got connected to a mentoring program that she saw promoted on a not-for-profit’s social media.

Other youth noted that they use social media to connect to their peers, for example connecting with classmates who were starting in the same post-secondary program beforehand, as well as hobby communities. One youth was aware that using social media to facilitate these connections could also potentially lead to a loss of actual in-person connection.

Some youth also expressed the idea that engaging with social media is needed in order for them to curate their professional profile or to gain exposure for their creative work. However, other youth shared that they have had a hard time connecting with others professionally (e.g., employers or clients) over social media. One youth shared that she has had some success making connections on sites like LinkedIn, but with an awareness that being recruited for employment and graduate studies opportunities should be taken with a grain of salt.

“I need to be on LinkedIn so people can connect with me and [so] I can connect with other people and so social media in terms of LinkedIn has been important for me and my job....I’ve been reached out to from recruiters and also like academic like MBA programs and stuff for recruiters as well. I don’t know how serious those have been

Although social media was seen as a tool for connection, youth also expressed an awareness of the need to have boundaries with social media and its potential mental health impacts. Multiple youth shared that they frequently take breaks from being on social media, or only use it for networking and not for their personal lives. Youth were very aware that algorithms are designed to be addictive and can have a negative impact on their lives and mental health if engaged with too much.

"I make it a point not to get lots of social media so it doesn't influence my life and it's not because I'm better than anyone it's because I'm exactly the same. Social media and the algorithms – it's made for you to be addicted to it and I know that I am I'm a perfect target, I'm just like anybody else and so I have intentionally stayed away from social media so that it does not have an impact in my life and so I'm not comparing myself to other folks."

Unfortunately, most youth experience barriers to mentorship. Among racialized youth, 85% reported at least one barrier to accessing mentoring, whereas 80% of white youth reported at least one barrier.

The top barriers to mentoring reported by racialized youth include: not knowing how to find a natural mentor, not thinking mentoring would be helpful, family not being interested in youth having a mentor, and not knowing how to find a mentoring program.

Similar barriers are described by white youth, with the exception of family not being interested, which was only reported by 11 per cent of white youth. Overall, about 16 per cent of white youth report not facing any challenges finding a mentor compared to 13 per cent of racialized youth.

Youth who are born in Canada are less likely to have a mentoring experience in early adulthood compared to 1st generation immigrant youth. This pattern disappears for racialized immigrant youth and racialized youth born in Canada.

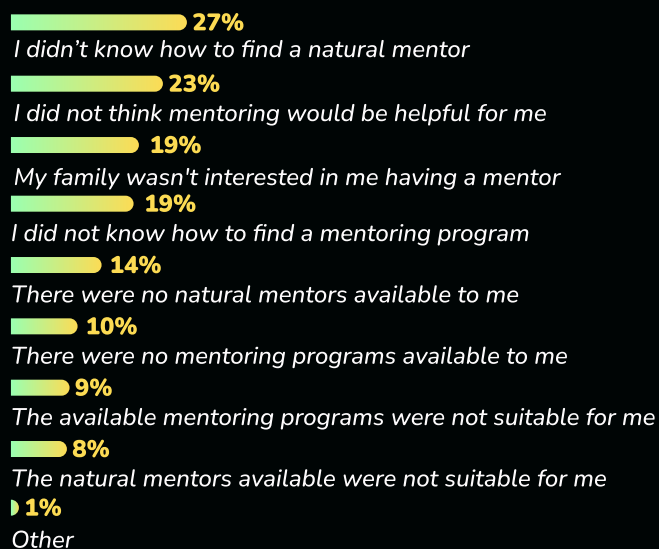
(Finding from national survey with n=1618 racialized youth and n=1492 white youth)

Barriers to Access

Some youth shared that they have found a disconnect in how mentoring programs are marketed, in that they **did not know that mentoring-type programs existed or they found out too late** about them.

"I didn't start seeking mentorship until very recently. I think the barrier would be that I didn't even know they existed. I never knew of any mentorship opportunities, but if they came knocking at my door, I would have signed up for them. I was an extremely motivated child. And if there was the opportunity that knocked at my door, I think I would have asked my mom to sign the form and be a part of it. And so I think the barrier was just like lack of knowing that mentorship was available."

Not knowing how to find a mentor is the most common difficulty reported by racialized youth in developing a mentor relationship



Other youth reflected that often mentoring opportunities are tied to or contingent on youth being involved in other programming.

“I feel like if I wasn’t a part of like a one specific program, I wouldn’t have really had like that intimate mentoring experience. And I feel like that’s something a lot of people are missing out on

A predominant narrative that youth shared is that they are ‘shy’ and therefore are hesitant to put themselves out there to connect with mentors or to access mentoring programs. Youth

expressed that they cannot form a trusting relationship with just anyone, and can find it overwhelming to figure out who it is safe to reach out to. Multiple youth shared that they need programs to come to them. They do not feel comfortable reaching out to programs because of their lived experiences with racism, discrimination, stereotypes and Othering.

It is crucial to think through the racialized aspect of youth’s perceived ‘shyness.’

Youth are often not accessing programming because of a well-founded lack of trust and lack of safety. BIPOC youth may have the experience of being continuously rejected when they reach out for help within predominantly white structures and institutions. Youth may fold into themselves or put on a mask in order to protect themselves in a system that is not safe for them.

While this may look to white people in institutions that BIPOC youth do not want to step out of their comfort zone, the reality is that racialized youth live in a world where they are constantly made to be and feel uncomfortable and unsafe. In turn, youth are made to feel ashamed for being ‘shy,’ but this is often a self-protection strategy. Mentoring programs that are looking to support BIPOC youth but lack understanding of racialized youths’ lived experiences may further perpetuate systemic issues that inform and impact youth, including the impact of white supremacy on BIPOC youth’s mental health.

“Throughout my whole life I’ve just been kind of shy and like I’ve always kept to myself. I never really [sought] help from anyone else, like through life changes, I guess. Like other than my family....I also feel like when I talk to professors or teachers at school, I feel like I have to like act differently or act more white.

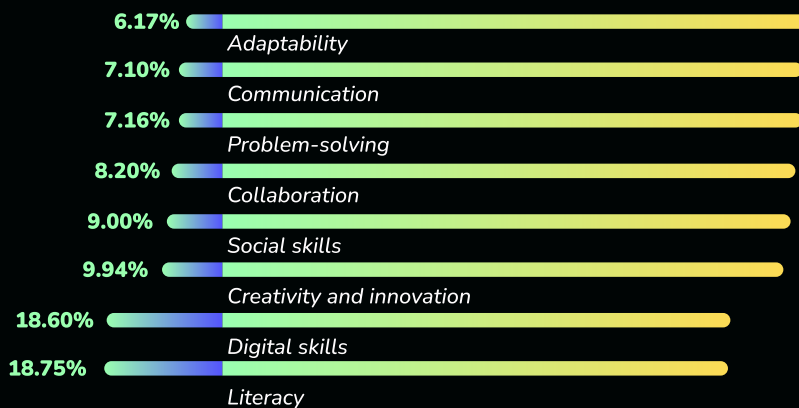
I guess I don’t know. Especially because, we’re Asian, I feel like there’s that model minority myth. So like, I feel like I’m expected to, like, know all of these things, especially if you’re in STEM or something, you’re like, expected to be smart. I don’t know. It kind of deters me from seeking help sometimes.”

Among racialized youth, those who had a mentor before turning 18 are more likely to be employed or in education, after controlling for demographic characteristics

(Finding from national survey with n=1618 racialized youth)

Mentors help racialized youth develop the following skills...

Disagree  Agree 



Some youth also shared that a **lack of access to practical supports**, like transportation, as well as unstable housing situations makes it difficult to have the capacity to engage in mentoring programs or opportunities. This highlights the importance of offering wrap-around supports for youth, as well as offering hybrid mentoring options.

Other youth highlighted that **lengthy application processes** are problematic, as many youth are balancing work and school and have limited time. A focus on **assigned relationships** as opposed to organic relationships was off-putting to some youth. Finally, some youth said there was a **lack of mentor-type programs for working class** youth, and a **lack of programming for older youth**.

“I feel like a lot of people who are between 25 and 30 kind of feel like isolated and kind of like thrown away.”

Impact of Mentoring on BIPOC Youth's Lives

What Mentors Helped With

Youth who had experience receiving mentorship – either through formal programs or through informal/natural mentorship – shared that their mentors helped them in multiple ways. Most youth described **career development mentoring**, with mentors helping them with post-secondary applications, career path guidance and re-direction, connections to contacts in fields of interest, resume development, job interview preparation, job referrals and references, salary negotiation advice, and help navigating workplace conflict and negative work experiences. Youth found this type of support to be very useful.

"I think mentorship is extremely valuable. Mentorship is one of the main reasons why I was able to get into Med school and pursue my goals...honestly, I don't think I would be here today without [my mentor] because I don't come from a

family with any connections in medicine. My parents are not doctors. Growing up, I didn't really know anyone in medicine, so it was kind of like a distant dream that I had and it was very helpful to have her guidance.

I feel like I hit the jackpot with my mentor...She's like, super connected... So she's kind of like me...She's a go getter kind of thing – always busy. And that's what I wanted to be like. And so she connected me with so many people in different industries that I would have never considered. I guess she saw different skill sets in me and she was like, 'oh, I know this is not really where you're wanting to go, but like, try this out or like talk to this person.' And

Among racialized youth who have experienced mentorship, more than 90 per cent agreed that their mentor helped them develop adaptability, communication, and problem-solving skills (similar to white youth).

Racialized youth are more likely to report mentors support their development of digital skills and literacy compared to white youth (64 and 68 per cent respectively for white youth compared to 81 per cent of racialized youth).

In addition to skill development, mentors support racialized youth in a number of ways. The most common are listening/being there for the mentee (96 per cent), providing advice and guidance (95 per cent), helping set and reach goals (94 per cent), broadening horizons through new experiences and opportunities (93 per cent), and connecting the mentee to people and services (92 per cent).

These supports are similar for white youth; however, racialized youth are slightly more likely to receive practical support, such as with transportation or housing, compared to white youth (83 vs 75 per cent respectively).

(Finding from national survey with n=1618 racialized youth and n=1492 white youth)

now even when I post things on LinkedIn, she'll be the first person to respond to my post or text me. She'll be like, 'oh, this is the person that you're looking for.'"

A number of youth highlighted the helpfulness of peer mentors with decision-making regarding their educational and career pathways. For example, youth recalled times when they received help from peer mentors in navigating high school and post-secondary application processes as a newcomer, including the English competency exam process, choosing post-secondary courses, and accessing resources.

One youth shared that she had a mentor who helped her connect to her Métis identity, and she would like more **cultural mentorship opportunities** for herself and other Indigenous youth. A few youth shared that mentors **supported their mental health**, for example, through sharing mental health resources, and helped them to overcome burnout and isolation during difficult transition periods. Two youth also shared how a mentor supported them to find housing.

A number of youth also highlighted specific **skills** that their mentors helped them develop, including artistic skills, managing a team, writing skills, realistic goal setting, and financial literacy, both in personal finance and in entrepreneurial and business finance.

Having a mentor is associated with the following benefits for racialized youth, after controlling for demographic characteristics:

- Positive mental health
- Better wellbeing
- Ability to challenge inequity
- Sense of belonging to their community

Among racialized youth, those who have had mentors (either before or after turning 18 years of age) are more likely than those without mentors to:

- have very good or excellent mental health*
- have better wellbeing often or all the time*
- have higher ability to challenge inequity (higher resistance capital)*
- have higher social capital (meaning they have someone in their life who listens, helps them understand themselves, provides information and support)*
- be flourishing and have a better sense of belonging to their communities*

Also among racialized youth, those youth who had mentorship experience before turning 18 years are more likely to report better educational belonging, meaning they felt they could speak up, ask for help, and be their full, genuine self at school. (But, having a mentor after turning 18 has no relationship with racialized youth's educational belonging).*

(Finding from national survey with n=1618 racialized youth)

Challenging and Negative Experiences

Some youth shared times that they had challenging or negative experiences with mentoring. A key theme that emerged around negative mentoring experiences was not hearing regularly from mentors and a related lack of connection. One youth shared the experiences of matching with a mentor through a peer-mentoring program, but never actually hearing from their assigned mentor. Another youth found infrequent meetings or communicating predominantly through text contributed to a less-than-ideal mentoring experience.

“So the mentorship program, I’d say that like the whole experience was nice...the mentor was OK. There wasn’t as [much] support that I would have liked. I still was able to listen to some of her journey and her guidance, her advice. But it wasn’t as impactful ... I guess it’s mainly because she herself [the mentor] was still a student. And the meetings weren’t frequent. And I think also like our communication through text and [to] set-up some meetings [wasn’t] great either.”

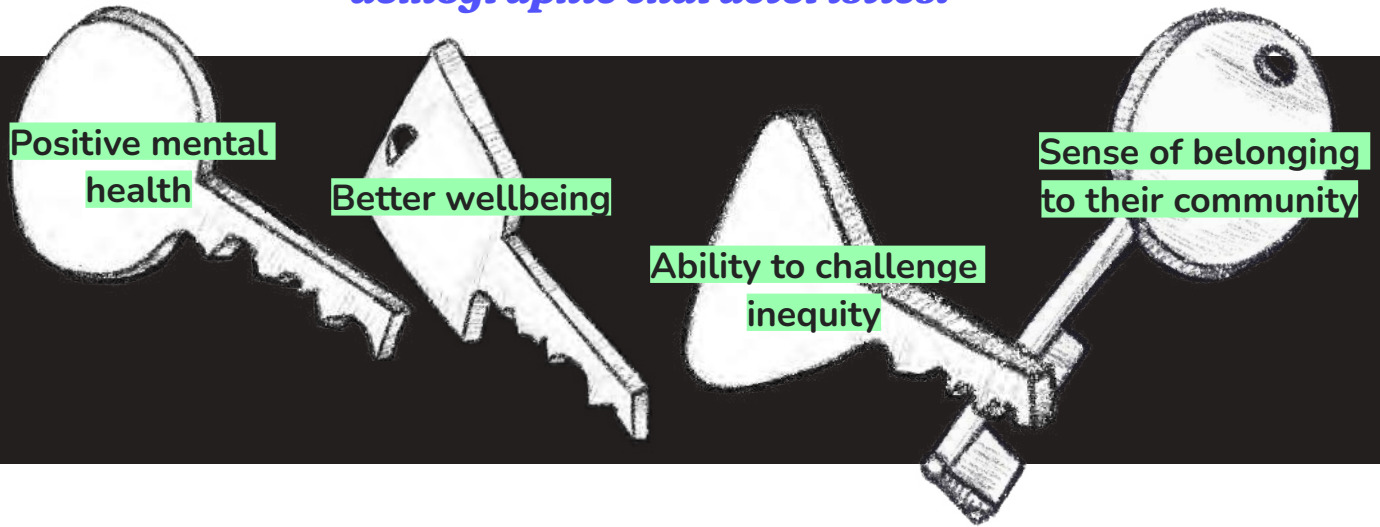
Some youth expressed hesitation towards mentorship, due to concerns about it not being an inequitable relationship, or feeling intimidated by mentors’ credentials and roles. Youth were clear that they wanted mentorship to be a partnership, with reciprocity.

“I think I am hesitant towards mentorships because I don’t like when they kind of give of a vibe of superiority. I think it should just be a partnership

Other youth identified a need for additional supports, alongside mentoring. One youth explained that it can be frustrating to be referred to external services and supports, signalling the need for integrated wrap-around supports in mentorship programming.

“If you have a mentorship program being hosted by an organization - so even like the one I’m connected to right now. I feel like when they ask like you know, ‘hey, is there anything we could support you with,’ if I share what I need support with, it’s like ‘well, yeah, maybe we can help refer you to another organization.’ There’s a lot of being referred somewhere else, there’s no in-house resources. That can be really annoying to have someone always say like, ‘hey, we’re here to help’ and then it’s like ‘actually we can’t help you. You should go here.’”

Having a mentor is associated with the following benefits for racialized youth, after controlling for demographic characteristics:



How Youth Have been Impacted

Mentorship as a source of **connection** was an outcome that multiple youth highlighted. For many youth, just the idea of someone being there for them had a big impact on their lives. One youth shared how important it was for her to be asked about her life by someone outside of her everyday social circle, as this offered her an avenue of support that she did not previously have access to.

"I was one of the lucky ones who got a mentor who was actually active. I think that experience was really shaping [to me] because I was used to hearing, you know, like, I was used to my guidance counselor. I was used to my teachers. I was used to my parents, my friends, you know, like, I was used to that same audience. I wasn't used to having someone else, someone that I don't know at all come in, and she asked, like, she would ask about my life. She would ask how school's going. She would ask if I needed support. She was, like, really, really helpful during those times in grade 12, where it was kind of difficult. And then, you know, just having random conversations with someone, I think that really helped."

Another youth shared how connection with her mentor helped her to validate how she felt when she was going through a difficult time transitioning into her first year of post-secondary.

"I think in first year when I struggled a lot and when I opened up to her, I could see that she cared. It wasn't invalidating, I felt like she didn't invalidate these issues like she validated. She's like, yeah, it's totally OK you're feeling like this, like first year's always hard for a lot of people.."

Relatedly, through feeling cared about and connected on an emotional level, youth also saw their mentoring relationships as a key source of **encouragement** in their lives. For example, one youth shared how their mentor helped her land a job in a fine arts field and then worked with her everyday for weeks to prepare for an emotional performance when she felt like she wanted to quit. Other youth shared similar experiences of receiving encouragement from their mentors.

"I was scared that [engineering] was going be too hard and I didn't really know anyone personally [who] was an engineer....So I didn't have anyone I knew who I could ask about [that]. So yeah, it was like her telling me, 'don't worry. It'll be fine'....It was a lot of just like personal encouragement, not just like sharing resources [on] the formal like mentorship topics."

"I'm a very open and talkative person. But when it comes to my own personal experiences, sometimes, you know, insecurities or lack of confidence gets me. And there she really is like my own personal cheerleader. And I really appreciate all the things that she's done for me."

Encouragement from mentors helped to build youth's **confidence**, which was another key mentoring outcome identified by several youth.

"Even like after the mentorship program I was definitely a lot more confident. And like it made me come out of my shell. But I think there's always room, like [for] more confidence to be gained."

Other youth shared that their mentors empowered them to push past their limits, as well as to make decisions that are true to them.

"I think she empowers me to make decisions that I feel confident about. I'll give an example, in undergrad in second year I was in one program that I started off with. I initially enjoyed it, but at some point I wasn't really interested in it anymore and it wasn't really helping me with my goals and so I was not sure if I should switch out in 3rd and 4th year and/or if I should stay in that [program] and I had a lot of thoughts about that and confusion about what to do. And so my mentor really empowered me to make a decision that was true to me and [to] not be afraid of changing my path and choosing things that align with me more as I grow and learn more about myself. So eventually I did switch out and- and [found a] major that I really liked a lot, more than my previous major and so I do credit that to her a lot."

Further, youth shared how their mentors' personal stories of resilience and perseverance in the face of setbacks inspired them, **modeling vulnerability**, which in turn empowered mentees to continue moving forward, and to 'do it scared,' as one youth shared.

"Another thing she really helped me with is just like, going for it. One thing I can really say I learned is like being brave is not like the absence of fear,

but it's like doing it despite that fear. I think she really showed me that...That helped me not just [in an] academic [or] professional [way], but even my social life."

In turn, many youth shared how their experiences with their mentors assisted and continued to assist them with growing into themselves and developing **self-trust** and **self-worth**.

"I think it made me more trusting. I feel like I'm more OK, like in the general terms. I'm more okay. OK, in like trusting individuals with like a little bit more about my life, I'm more like open and able to speak without like regretting like 'oh no I talked too much' or 'I said the wrong thing. And I'm gonna regret it all night.' So, you know, I'm a bit more OK with that."

"I think she helped me to like self-actualize myself and I was able to bridge between who I was at the time and who I wanted to see myself emerge into. And so even now, it's been maybe two or three years since I first met my initial mentor, I can kind of see what the growth of myself and the things that she's instilled in me, particularly around like my voice and my self worth."

Research Findings from Mentor Stakeholders

In this section, we present findings from the interviews with mentor stakeholders. First, we summarize mentor stakeholders' understanding of racialized youth's skills, strengths and life experiences. Then, we summarize mentor stakeholders' perspectives on the important things that mentoring can help racialized youth with. Finally, we summarize mentor stakeholders' comments on the current state of mentorship for racialized youth.

Mentor stakeholders offered insights into the overall patterns or trends they see among the youth that they work with, beyond individual experiences. Mentor stakeholders mostly worked or volunteered in mentorship programs, and some identified as racialized youth themselves.

Understanding Racialized Youth Perspectives & Experiences

Skills & Strengths

Mentor stakeholders said that BIPOC youth exhibit a significant degree of **resourcefulness**, a skill developed through navigating challenging systems, limited resources, and often hostile environments. This skill is not just about making do, but about **actively seeking opportunities** and finding creative solutions to problems. Their ability to **adapt** and **create** opportunities when others might see obstacles is a core asset for BIPOC youth, according to mentor stakeholders. BIPOC youth demonstrate a hard-won **resiliency** in the face of adversity. They have nuanced **perspectives grounded in their lived experiences**, which are an asset in work settings, particularly in social justice fields. BIPOC youth are **connected and committed to their families and broader communities**, with a strong drive to create a positive impact.

Resourcefulness

Mentor stakeholders explained that BIPOC youth often must carve out their own spaces in systems that were not designed to support them. They learn to **interpret signals, read cues**, and take **initiative** to succeed where others might not. This results in a high level of **self-sufficiency** and initiative.

It forces a racialized individual or a racialized youth to become



resourceful. We [they] learn how to carve out our [their] little space, right?

This **self-reliance** helps youth develop not only practical skills but also an inner strength that becomes crucial when they face barriers in education or employment. Resourcefulness also manifests in how BIPOC youth proactively seek out mentorship and opportunities. Rather than wait for support to come to them, they actively search for the resources they need, even without formal guidance or suggestions. This proactive approach is crucial for their growth and ability to navigate systems that may overlook them. Eagerness to find and use available resources means BIPOC youth often outpace others in identifying opportunities that might otherwise remain hidden to them.

Mentor stakeholders described BIPOC youth as deeply **aspirational** and actively seeking growth opportunities. Whether it is through education, volunteering, or career development, youth are eager to build on their existing skills and seize opportunities for advancement. Their aspirations often centre around creating a better future, both for themselves and for their communities.

Many youth are not just seeking employment but are also interested in leadership roles where they can have a broader impact. They are eager to contribute to fields they care about, especially social justice, youth empowerment, and community organizing.

“I think folks [youth] are also interested in how they can be involved in like leadership opportunities and also more practically in their field of study, whether it’s through volunteering or an employment opportunity, and it, and I would say, yeah, they’re very eager to, like, be engaged in a way that makes sense for them, like for their passions and if it’s related to like their field of study.”

Mentor stakeholders saw youth’s desire for leadership as rooted in a strong sense of purpose. Youth want to make a lasting impact and are using their skill of resourcefulness to actively seek opportunities that will allow them to do so.

Resilience, Optimism & Adaptability in the Face of Adversity

Mentor stakeholders identified resilience as another defining trait of BIPOC youth. Youth show an incredible ability to **adapt** and **bounce back** from adversity. Whether navigating systemic racism, dealing with economic hardship, or overcoming personal setbacks, resilience enables BIPOC youth to keep moving forward in the face of challenges. BIPOC youth are often pushed to their limits by external circumstances, whether battling stereotypes, facing discrimination, or

dealing with immigration challenges. This constant need to persevere, even when the odds are stacked against them, builds a **resilient mindset** that helps them persist and ultimately succeed.

“I think I would say that racialized youth by and large are quite resilient.”

“Even by well-meaning people, the structures that we live within do privilege some more than others and typically, racialized individuals and youth have more to contend with...even in passing, it might be something you experience. They have more to contend with, and that builds strength that can’t be taken for granted.”

Resilience is not just about surviving adversity, it’s about **growing stronger** from it, using each challenge as an opportunity to build character and inner fortitude. Mentor stakeholders talked about how BIPOC youth are impacted by global events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and how these events have further tested their resilience. Despite these challenges, mentor stakeholders see that youth demonstrate a remarkable ability to adapt, learn from their experiences, and push forward. Global challenges like the pandemic have forced youth to adapt quickly and find new ways to pursue their goals, which further builds their resilience.

“I feel like in terms of the young people that I get to work with in my role, I feel like some strengths and assets that I’ve been able to observe is their resilience. Which can’t be taken for granted when also many of these young people are truly affected by world events that are related to different aspects of their identity. And so, their resilience is definitely one of their strengths and assets from the pandemic also and then emerging from that, I think that can’t be taken for granted.”

According to mentor stakeholders, many BIPOC youth have personal backgrounds and histories that serve as a wellspring of resilience. Whether it is being part of an immigrant family, experiencing social injustice, or learning to navigate different cultures, these experiences teach youth to be resilient as they forge their paths forward.

“One thing that I always do, connecting with a new mentee is always asking them about their background and you’ll just be amazed. The kind of talent, the kind of time they actually take into building themselves before they actually come to Canada, you’re going to meet people who are actually here for a second degree. But just because, their degrees... from their home countries, are not recognized. So, they could be they could have, you know, higher degrees in education and then they come, and they start all over again. So, they’ve gone through the whole teaching process back in their home countries, but they just cannot transfer that knowledge and all of a

sudden become a teacher or certified teacher in in Canada. And so there's a lot of talent, a lot of experience."

This rich background of lived experience, including overcoming systemic barriers, gives BIPOC youth a unique perspective and strength that helps them navigate challenges in new environments.

“Resilience is a gift, but it’s hard-won. It’s not a pleasant thing. It builds you, but it’s tough.”

The emotional toll of resilience is often overlooked, yet mentor stakeholders noted how it plays a significant role in shaping youth’s capacity for empathy, compassion, and the desire for change. Despite the many barriers they face, mentor stakeholders say that BIPOC youth often exhibit an incredible sense of optimism and energy. This energy is driven by a deep desire to change their circumstances, make an impact, and see the world become a better place for future generations. Their optimism is not naive; it is rooted in their belief that change is possible, even in systems that often seem resistant to it. BIPOC youth’s optimism allows them to maintain hope and drive, even when circumstances seem impossible. It fuels their desire to push for social change, and it motivates them to create opportunities where none seem to exist. This energy is infectious and drives their personal and professional aspirations.

“Oftentimes they’ve had, you know, not very positive outlooks on it as compared to their ‘non-racialized’ counterparts and that being said, it doesn’t stop them from being optimistic about the change that they can bring.”

Optimism for BIPOC youth is a powerful motivator that helps them overcome adversity and push forward, knowing that their actions can lead to meaningful change. Many youth, especially those involved in social justice work, are energized by the possibility of shaping a different future. They are keen to explore new ideas and dream collectively about how to bring about change. This optimism often manifests as a desire to **dream big** and think creatively about the future.

“We always ask, what are you dreaming about? What changes do you want to see? That’s where we get very curious ideas.”

Youth’s energy is not just about personal growth; it is also about collective dreaming and creating shared visions for a better future, especially in fields of social impact.

Perspectives Stemming from Lived Experience

Mentor stakeholders recognized that BIPOC youth bring a **unique and valuable perspective** shaped by their lived experiences. These experiences, often including challenges and adversity, help youth develop a deeper understanding of the world and their place in it. Youth gain a critical lens through which they view societal structures and their own potential for change. However, this perspective comes with emotional labour, as they are constantly navigating environments that are not always welcoming or inclusive.

Because of their lived experiences, BIPOC youth are more attuned to systemic gaps and the challenges within societal structures. They see what is not working, what needs to be changed, and often become the voices for reform.

“When you work with others who share a similar background, you can relate for [to] a lot of things and that makes you stronger and you’re also able to see gaps in the system a lot better”

Youth’s experiences of discrimination, immigration, or cultural adaptation shape how they view systems and structures and contribute to a nuanced understanding of the world. Their shared experiences with others from similar backgrounds make them particularly adept at **identifying structural inequalities** that need to be addressed. Mentor stakeholders acknowledged that while these experiences make youth empathetic and compassionate, they also make youth acutely aware of the barriers they face, which can be emotionally taxing.

BIPOC youth bring a wealth of lived experience to their work, including social impact work. Many are first-generation university graduates or first-generation professionals (e.g., first-generation law students), who are deeply connected to their communities. Their knowledge of anti-Black racism and other systemic issues does not only come from theoretical understanding; it is based on real-life experiences, making them highly informed and passionate about creating change. They are often more equipped to understand the gaps in systems and more committed to closing those gaps.

“Something that you notice is, you know, they’re just very informed on these issues. They have probably experienced them, so you know we don’t have to explain these concepts to them of you know what anti-Black racism looks like for example, they’re very well versed in it. And they come to the program and to their [professional] education with that in mind. So that’s something as well as this knowledge of all these different concepts and things. And then a lot of them are also, you know, first generation [professionals] or first-generation university grads.”

Mentor stakeholders explained that the lived experiences of BIPOC youth make them experts in the issues they care about, giving them the knowledge and drive to tackle injustices head-on. They know the issues intimately, which fuels their desire to address them.

Connection & Commitment to Communities

Mentor stakeholders noted that for BIPOC youth, community connection is a core element of identity and strength. Youth draw on their communities, whether their families, cultural groups, or peer networks, for support, solidarity, and a sense of belonging. This connection provides them with the emotional resources they need to cope with challenges, as well as the **shared knowledge** to help navigate life's issues.

Family plays a key role in providing the foundation of support that helps youth thrive. Mentor stakeholders commented on the cultural strength youth receive from their communities, and how it can be both a source of motivation and a safe space to process their experiences.

“One of the things that sticks out is family and some of the important things that family has to offer. And so, it’s one of the things across board. Family is such an important factor on their education. Getting that support is so beneficial to their growth... A large topic that’s been brought up by the people I work with and my mentees as well, is the topic of community. And their families being a strength and a weakness at times. Sometimes it can be a very strong cultural background and that can be very beneficial. It can help drive their life and set them up really well for their future progress.”

Mentor stakeholders noted that youth often connect with peers who share similar cultural backgrounds or lived experiences. These relationships offer a unique level of understanding, as they relate to each other on a deep, personal level.

BIPOC youth demonstrate a strong commitment to community engagement and social impact, which is often rooted in their personal experiences with marginalization and their desire to create positive change. They often approach community work not just as a personal goal but as a collective responsibility. They recognize the interdependence of their communities and feel a duty to support one another. According to mentor

These insights from mentor stakeholders about the social and family expectations facing youth echo some of the earlier findings from the youth survey and interviews. However, this experience is nuanced, and not true for all racialized youth and their families – we heard from some youth who were looking for more guidance from their families, for example.

stakeholders, strong family ties and community support systems often lead BIPOC youth to feel a sense of responsibility toward their communities. This commitment is intertwined with the values instilled by their families (and others who are part of their network), creating a foundation for youth's social impact work.

Many BIPOC youth, especially those in fields like law or advocacy, hold a critical yet hopeful outlook toward systems like the legal and justice system. Their experiences with systemic racism and inequality provide them with a deep understanding of how these systems fail marginalized communities. Yet, this critical awareness does not make them give up; it fuels their desire to make a positive impact and advocate for reform. They understand the system's shortcomings, but they still believe that change is possible and that their efforts can help reshape it.

“Students who come to our program who are racialized will often have the idea that like we acknowledge that it’s not a great system, but we have some kind of faith and hope in the system. And so, it’s a much more nuanced perspective.”

Lived Experiences

Social or Family Expectations

Mentor stakeholders said that BIPOC youth can face intense family expectations, particularly around career choices. Mentor stakeholders saw family support and encouragement as foundational to BIPOC youth's success. However, they also recognized that BIPOC youth can experience feelings of stress and shame if they struggle to meet expectations or feel trapped in a field that does not align with their passions or talents. There is also pressure to succeed for the sake of the family's reputation.

“You feel shame when you’re like I spent X amount of my parents’ money on this degree and I can’t even get outcomes from it. And my parents are continuously asking me, like what’s next?”

High expectations can create significant stress, as youth feel torn between family values and personal aspirations, leading to emotional strain. Some youth experience a lack of agency or decision-making control over their lives. This can be especially true for young women.

“Sometimes it’s not just like when we’re [they’re] navigating life here, but also our [their] culture and our [their] different identities too. Like how our

[their] relationship is with our [their] siblings or with our [their] parents? Do they support what we [they] want to do? Even like communities that we're [they're] part of, like what conversations are happening there? That dialogue also needs to change, especially when it comes to racialized young women."

Recognition for Experience and Credentials

Mentor stakeholders considered one of the most significant barriers for BIPOC youth to be limited recognition of their credentials or, for newcomer youth, lack of Canadian work experience and references. Even entry-level jobs often require years of experience. Many youth graduate with degrees that do not immediately translate into jobs. This can lead to underemployment or having to take jobs far beneath their qualifications, which impacts their career growth, self-esteem, and financial stability. Mentor stakeholders saw that some youth who take on **survival jobs** in low-paying positions get stuck there.

“It takes time to find a job, keep it, and actually rise.

“I’ve also come across people who, for the lack of experience, have to find jobs that are completely not related to what they studied in school. And that’s more common. I would say 80% of people that I have either mentored or continue to teach, have that problem. So if they are in the sciences, what I do find is in the sciences, it’s easier for them to get a job. Or for somebody who did, let’s say, who studied a program on the environment, that person is more likely to get a job, probably a month or two after school. But what I find with those who complete degrees in the arts, whether it’s Master of Arts in sociology, political science, it takes them quite a while and they often would start with menial jobs like Walmart, Best Buy, Staples, because that’s quick and easy to get, and you find them doing that for about a year or two and then all of a sudden they come to this realization. “Oh my God, this is not what I studied for. I’m making money just enough to pay bills, but there’s no career development here.”

The disconnect between academic achievement and job opportunities creates a sense of disillusionment for BIPOC youth, as they feel stuck in entry-level positions despite their qualifications.

Identity and Belonging

BIPOC youth, especially those from newcomer or immigrant families, are navigating aspects of identity, forming an understanding of who they are, where they belong, and how they are seen by others. One mentor stakeholder described youth’s experience as an “existential identity crisis that never goes away.” Another described how youth experience a **tension** between “fitting in” to Canadian culture

or losing their “true self.”

“They just don’t feel like they belong here, and they can’t also go back home because they are not from home.”

“Those challenges of fitting into [Canadian] society....She has that fear that she’s losing her true self, and she’s now feeling that she’s being disconnected from her actual real home. It’s not the same when I go back. So how do I make sure I stay connected with my roots?”

Mentor stakeholders described BIPOC youth as highly attuned to the spoken and unspoken messages they receive about how they are perceived by others. One mentor stakeholder shared a story of their mentee in a job interview, who noticed that a member of the hiring committee was repeatedly turning their head to the side and inclining their ear toward him, suggesting that they could not understand him. He felt that his performance in the interview was undermined. Another mentor stakeholder shared concerns that racialized youth “can come across as rude” to others who lack cultural humility and are not familiar with the cultural and societal norms the youth may have been raised with.

“There’s a lot of work to be done to ensure that racialized youth feel safe. And feel that they belong and feel comfortable being who they are and that they can reach for the stars.”

Navigating Racially Hostile Environments

Mentor stakeholders talked about the lived experiences of BIPOC youth in navigating racially hostile environments – including white systems and structures like education systems, post-secondary institutions, and workplace settings – that can leave them feeling unsafe, isolated, alienated, invisible, and ignored.

“It hurts to exist in a structure that was not created for that person to thrive.”

“They are navigating a predominantly white institution... by default some spaces on campus, for example, are not safe spaces for them, or they don’t feel like they can be their authentic selves because of this environment... that could be one challenge for folks is finding that sense of belonging and community and feelings of isolation and alienation that can come with navigating predominantly white institution for them.”

BIPOC youth may be expected to stand out or be exceptional in ways that their white peers are not, or to put in more effort and work simply to have their voice heard. Youth bear an **emotional burden** and a sense of powerlessness, as well as exhaustion, from these experiences.

“One of my mentees shared an instance where she said that her ideas are often suppressed, whereas if the other person who was white is sharing the same idea, more attention is being paid to his ideas, even if they are the same.

When you see that [other] people just move smoothly through the process... But it's like we have to break the barrier. We have to explain ourselves. We have to have twice the amount of results, while other people can just waltz through.

You have to work twice as hard, even more, compared to your white counterpart, just to show that you are equally deserving of a certain space or opportunity. It's very emotionally taxing too when you show up in spaces because then you start questioning your own self worth, if you're even worth being in a certain space. You take a lot of emotional baggage with you when you show up in certain spaces now. It's a constant internal battle. It takes a physical toll on you as well... When you're constantly striving to prove yourself, but you're not seeing an end result, you're not seeing a positive outcome.”

One mentor stakeholder recounted an instance when a newcomer youth was met with hostility in the workplace from people holding xenophobic ideas about immigrants “taking jobs” from Canadians. Another mentor shared an example of racialized youth being treated either as a “token minority” for an organization trying to “hit their quotas,” or conversely, seen as a “threat” and passed over.

Facing racial hostility, BIPOC youth can feel compelled to present themselves in a way that hide aspects of their identity. Mentor stakeholders recalled examples of youth who felt the need to change their names or adjust their cultural identity to be taken seriously or to avoid discrimination. Names or cultural markers can automatically place them in a box that might hinder their being offered opportunities, impacting their chances for success. Youth feel they must conceal an essential part of themselves to be accepted.

Racialized youth do not always see themselves represented in educational and professional settings. This **lack of representation** is especially apparent within leadership positions.

“A big conversation for us with the younger women was like, I don't even know what careers to explore sometimes because I don't even see folks with my identity reflected in those leadership roles, or if I can attain that.”

The lack of representation can contribute to feelings of isolation, disconnection, and hopelessness. One mentor stakeholder explained racialized youth's experience of “feeling like you don't have a possibility to land a position or to land a specific job in

a specific place of work, because no one else there looks like you.” Another mentor stakeholder noted that racialized youth can fear that doors are closed to them: “The fear is aggravated when youth don’t see people who look like them in those positions.”

Racialized mentor stakeholders shared their own first-hand experiences of confronting a lack of representation in their careers too.

“I’m very lonely in my position as a BIPOC person leading a nonprofit organization in this sector... Folks are going to help me, but there’s a lot they don’t understand about my background, and there’s a lot more support that I need that they don’t actually see me needing.”

Even when BIPOC youth gain entry into white institutions or workplaces, they still face challenges related to limited opportunities for **progression and career advancement**. Such barriers exist regardless of performance, making youth feel that no matter what they do, they cannot get ahead. Mentor stakeholders observed that youth have to continually “oversell” themselves and demonstrate exceptionally high resilience and confidence to persevere when repeatedly overlooked.

“Everyone is telling you you’re doing such a great job, you’re really changing the space, you’re so tech savvy...You’ve taken so much work off our shoulders...So many great comments and pats on the back. But where does it lead to? It doesn’t lead to recognition. It doesn’t lead to any awards. It doesn’t lead to any promotions.”

One mentor stakeholder reflected on their own journey toward recognizing that systemic barriers were affecting their career trajectory as a BIPOC youth.

“Some of the things that didn’t work out for me, maybe it wasn’t because I wasn’t smart enough or good at it. Maybe it was just the way some systems were designed that I had a disadvantage and there was nothing I can do, no matter how good I was.”

What Mentors Can Help Racialized Youth With

Mentor stakeholders offered insight into the knowledge and skills that matter most for BIPOC youth, which can be fostered through mentorship. Mentor stakeholders explained that the knowledge and skills that mentorship focuses on should be targeted depending on the life stage of the youth. Career decision making self-efficacy, healthy coping and physical wellness, communication, confidence and self-esteem, understanding how systems work, and networking skills were discussed the most. A wide range of other skills were also cited, including academic skills; critical thinking; literacy, including reading and writing, reading comprehension, and

vocabulary; entrepreneurial skills; resume writing, job interview and job search skills; life skills like budgeting and personal finance; and cultural history and language.

Career Decision-Making Self Efficacy

Mentor stakeholders highlighted **career decision-making self-efficacy** as a priority for BIPOC youth, particularly for high school aged youth.

“The younger they are, they don’t know what they want to do.”

Mentor stakeholders emphasized that mentorship should focus on helping BIPOC youth identify and explore career paths that will be fulfilling and meaningful – “help them find purpose” and “connect to their passion.”

“That isn’t really traditional career advice per se, but rather just finding something meaningful they can put their heart into... serving a common goal or a common mission. They can find purpose, a sense of responsibility and a sense of fulfillment, doing work they actually care about...Even if they come from a background where they may have been receiving help for most of their life, they can still provide help and be the impetus for change.”

Mentor stakeholders saw that BIPOC youth are also keen to navigate educational barriers, whether in post-secondary education or vocational training. They understand that these challenges are part of their journey, and they actively seek mentors who can help them break through those barriers.

“I’m helping my mentee navigate her educational barriers and how she can better integrate into her university and how I can support her to further amplify her, you know, empower her to polish up her personality for future employment.”

Knowledge of How Systems Work

Through mentorship, BIPOC youth can gain knowledge of how the systems they interact with work. In particular, it is valuable for BIPOC youth to understand how application processes work, “and navigating the nuances of what it’s like to go through that process as a Black and racialized person.” Mentor stakeholders noted the importance of helping youth learn about where to look for scholarship opportunities or work study programs, and how to navigate systems like social insurance, Service Canada, and filing taxes.

For newcomer youth, mentors can help explain how Canadian-based systems may be similar or different to systems they have encountered in other countries. For example, one mentor stakeholder explained that a youth she mentored came from a country where it was common to rely on familial connections to foster professional opportunities, which stood in contrast to merit-based applications. Mentors can also

help newcomer youth understand the immigration system, including what benefits are and are not available to newcomers, and the responsibilities associated with study permits and work permits.

Advocacy and Resistance Capital

Some mentor stakeholders drew connections between knowing and understanding how a system works, and youth's ability to advocate for themselves within that system. Mentor stakeholders discussed the importance of fostering critical thinking and independent learning amongst BIPOC youth through mentoring, helping them to find a collective voice, engage in community organizing, and to push for change for self and for community. Mentoring was described as a way to "challenge these systems of oppression and racism." One mentor noted that while mentorship can play a role, it is not enough on its own.

"When we talk about mentorship, we also have to talk about sponsorship. Like, who is willing to stick up for me? Like actually say your name when opportunities are discussed and you're not there?"

Healthy Coping and Wellness

Healthy coping skills and social emotional learning were also identified as important. Mentor stakeholders recognized that racialized youth may turn to escapism and emotional numbing, relying on unhealthy coping mechanisms (including screen time). Learning new skills, such as meditation, breathwork, and grounding techniques through mentorship could help youth to be "present and engaged and connected...giving yourself the rest and the body break that you may need in that moment instead of being on your phone."

One Indigenous mentor stakeholder noted, "Technology rewires their brain for self-gratification, instant gratification...and it takes them away from physical or other fulfilling activities." They explained the importance of helping youth to focus on physical **wellness** to counteract these effects.

"Being strong, physically strong...One of our medicine wheel components... The emotional and mental are almost like they're on overload because of what we see on social media. Everybody wants to be famous. Everybody wants to be a creator. And so it's one of the things we need to get back to: how do we engage them physically? I'm like let's go. Let's go pick medicine. Let's go build a sweat. Let's go make a fire... That could benefit their life immensely."

Confidence and Self-Esteem

Almost all mentor stakeholders discussed the importance of a strong foundation of confidence and self-esteem for BIPOC youth. Mentor stakeholders explained that without confidence and a healthy sense of self, BIPOC youth will not feel empowered to speak up, build their professional network, perform well in an interview, or advocate for a promotion.

“Confidence around learning, confidence in themselves... The ability to raise their hand in class, connect to their peers, ask the teacher for help when they need help, instead of being shy, reserved, quiet and sort of in a self-defeating mindset.”

Mentor stakeholders explained that BIPOC youth can face imposter syndrome, feeling like they are not good enough, or that they do not belong or are not deserving. They described some BIPOC youth as feeling inhibited, shy, or self-conscious, afraid to say something wrong or make a mistake. These feelings may be especially strong for English language learners who find it hard to confidently express themselves.

“They’re not going to go out and sign up for things that you should or you’re not going to apply for things that you deserve because you think you don’t deserve them.”

Mentoring “can really change” a young person’s confidence and encourage them. One mentor stakeholder explained that they have found it helpful to role model/role play scenarios with their mentee, as a way to build their confidence around specific scenarios, like approaching a professor. Another mentor stakeholder noted that mentorship provides youth with more knowledge, which is the pathway to building confidence.

“Confidence and knowledge, I think kind of go hand in hand in my perspective, the more knowledge you have about things, the more opportunities you have, the more confidence that can build and grow.”

Communication

BIPOC youth need strong communication skills. Mentor stakeholders highlighted the importance of many different aspects of communication, including learning how to introduce yourself; how to approach someone; being able to absorb, interpret, and articulate or convey information; communicating intergenerationally or with other people who have different experiences; and understanding nuances in vocabulary and word choice. Communication skills may be especially important for youth who are English language learners.

In some racialized communities, it can be difficult for youth to speak up. Mentor stakeholders explained that there is a trust building process with mentors to overcome those challenges and get mentees to a place where they are comfortable coming to the mentor and sharing their challenges.

“And that leads me to communication. Because I would say all over the world, nobody teaches us how to communicate. They teach us math. They teach us, you know, maybe how to write an academic essay with very certain parameters, but nobody teaches us how to do a pitch, how to do an elevator pitch. If you go to a recruitment event or employment fair or on a bus stop, just even talking to a person which is a very common thing in Canada, but that’s small talk. It’s not something that you just wake up with. It took me as an immigrant a lot of time and practice conscious, really practice

So many, I think the biggest challenge in my own personal background is having been raised in a low-income family. My family has never been...they’re now middle class. I’ve got low, low, middle class and I’ve always struggled to see the other side of things and to understand how to behave and even social circles of people with different backgrounds. And I’ve had to learn that through making mistakes, through falling down and learning from the mistakes I make and through experiential learning, I wish there was a bridge, more of a mentorship component where I could have received some guidance on how to engage in these conversations.”

Networking and information-gathering

Many mentor stakeholders emphasized networking as a critical skill for BIPOC youth to build. Networking, pitching, and self-promotion are important aspects of BIPOC youth’s ability to fully leverage their potential in professional spaces. Information-gathering was described as an important skill that may not come naturally to youth, even if they are smart and filled with ideas. The ability to take initiative and actively seek out ways to turn ideas into action – including “chasing after people” and “making the first move” – are assets for BIPOC youth, especially for older youth as they build and progress in their careers.

To facilitate connections, mentor stakeholders said BIPOC youth need strong interpersonal skills, including collaboration, teamwork, empathy, and the ability to relate to others.

“It’s a skill that needs to be taught – figuring out what kind of people youth should be connecting with, how to find them, how to make conversations meaningful.”

One mentor stakeholder described the skill of networking as learning to share one’s story and have frank conversations.

“It’s sharing your story. It’s asking people right questions, asking for advice, and sometimes saying, ‘I really want this opportunity, how can I get it?’ Having some frank conversations to see if they can support you in that journey.”

Another mentor stakeholder said networking is about knowing what to ask, and fostering a “thriving community” of connections of people who can address those questions. Mentorship programs can provide youth with large scale networking opportunities with low barriers to access.

Youth who are able to hone their networking skills can increase their access to opportunities. One mentor stakeholder shared story of a youth who connected to a director on LinkedIn, had a coffee chat with them, and ultimately received a job offer, while bypassing the hiring committee.

“They had contracted an external hiring group to deal with all the first round interviews, but because she had this coffee chat, she knew the director and through that was able to receive an offer.”

Current mentoring programs

Successful Elements & Outcomes

Peer Group Mentoring

Some mentor stakeholders talked about the success of current mentorship programs that are incorporating elements of peer and group mentorship. In these programs, staff are taking more of an administrative role, while youth are at the forefront of leading peer mentoring, planning events, engaging mentees.

“They’re in a group and what we find that has happened is that it really breaks down the inherent power dynamic that can come with one-to-one relationships and we find that the peer mentors are also learning from the

mentees and really connecting on these shared experiences of what it's like to navigate a predominantly white institution.

That breaks down a lot of power dynamics and creates that comfortability and sense of belonging so that people are able to show up as themselves and also feel supported at the same time.”

Social Media

Mentor stakeholders reflected on the role of social media in current mentorship programs. One mentor stakeholder described social media as a “prime example of how we communicate, how we market, how we connect to racialized youth” and “a method for destigmatizing conversations.” This stakeholder shared a recent example of a mentorship program posting on social media on the topic of mental health and anxiety.

“It really connected with youth... I think social media is a quick, fast way to connect to youth...Opening up dialogue for a future [mentoring] session, and making sure youth experiences are heard.

Another mentor stakeholder explained that mentors have used social media to share and open up about their own stories, which can then start a conversation with youth. Social media may be a particularly useful tool for BIPOC youth who may “feel very unheard and very isolated and don’t have connection with anyone who thinks like them.” Social media can provide “validation” and broaden youths’ connections to people who share their experiences and views, who they may not have otherwise had access to.

During the interview process, the research team reflected on how mentor stakeholder interviews were challenging to schedule and how common it was for the virtual interviews to be interrupted or paused so the interviewees could attend to personal or family matters, (for example, arranging transportation for a parent, ordering lunch for their family, attending to or answering questions from their children). It was clear that they were busy people who did not necessarily have dedicated time to devote to their mentoring initiatives.

Additionally, we offered compensation for those who were participating in the research on their own time, anticipating that many mentor stakeholders would participate on behalf of an organization and thus be compensated by their employer. Instead, we saw that the majority of mentor stakeholders participated in the interviews on their own time.

Altogether, this demonstrated to the research team that mentoring was something most mentors in our sample did during their personal time, balancing additional familial and professional commitments. The lack of supports for mentors and the fact that mentoring typically relies on free labour from mentors and mentees were noted as key challenges both to individuals as well as to the field.

In today's digital age, mentor stakeholders described the ways in which BIPOC youth have embraced **online platforms** like LinkedIn, WhatsApp, and Twitter to build professional networks, connect with mentors, and access information. The ability to **network virtually** broadens their reach and provides more opportunities to build relationships that could lead to career growth or mentorship. Social media and other online platforms were described as tools for BIPOC youth to overcome barriers of access and location, allowing them to make valuable connections and seek guidance from mentors outside their immediate environment.

"I think one thing that really helps is like social media and connecting with people online...to make some really good connections and like seek out mentors or maybe just invite people for a coffee chat online... [A BIPOC youth] was able to find a career coach through that... For young people having that online space has been really, really good."

Another mentor stakeholder described using Discord as a tool in mentoring, to connect to youth who may otherwise be harder to reach.

"My volunteers started a whole Discord channel just to play games together [with youth mentees]. I thought that was really cool. And it's working. So, if those things work, I'd say use those as tools to connect, and that's where I think social media does apply and connecting with folks who are somewhat more on the outskirts, some of them are actually on social media."

One mentor stakeholder offered a contrasting view, emphasizing in-person interactions, rather than online connections.

"I think in youth's case, having a genuine connection is more important than online, and I think there's a lot of material online, but it's not a genuine human face-to-face interaction."

Challenges Current Programs Encounter

Mentor stakeholders identified several challenges currently facing mentorship programs for racialized youth. Some mentor stakeholders noted that career-focused mentorship programs struggle to stay current amidst **changes in the labour market**. Fields change rapidly and in unpredictable ways, work environments and workplace culture evolve quickly, and certain jobs do not even exist anymore. In the face of these changes, it can be challenging for mentorship programs to keep content and methods relevant and up to date. Mentors need to be responsive and flexible, evolving to support youth in an ever-changing world.

Current mentor programs often endure a **lack of adequate resources**. Many mentoring programs faced funding cuts following the COVID-19 pandemic.

In particular, mentor stakeholders noted that post-secondary institutions now have less assistance for students with disabilities and have less structural and institutional supports available. Many mentoring programs rely on project-based funding, which limits the ability to develop and plan in advance, or sustain and maintain consistency. At the same time as funding has been cut, mentoring programs have also seen a **rise in demand** for their services. This leads to waitlists for mentoring programs, or in some cases decreases the quality of programming that is offered. It also leads to over-burdening and burn-out of mentors and program administrators, who have more to do with fewer resources.

Volunteers can be used to address some gaps in resources, but it is not enough. When relying on mentor volunteers, mentor screening becomes more limited, as programs focus on simply trying to recruit as many as mentors possible. This ultimately affects youth's choice and the quality of the mentor-mentee match.

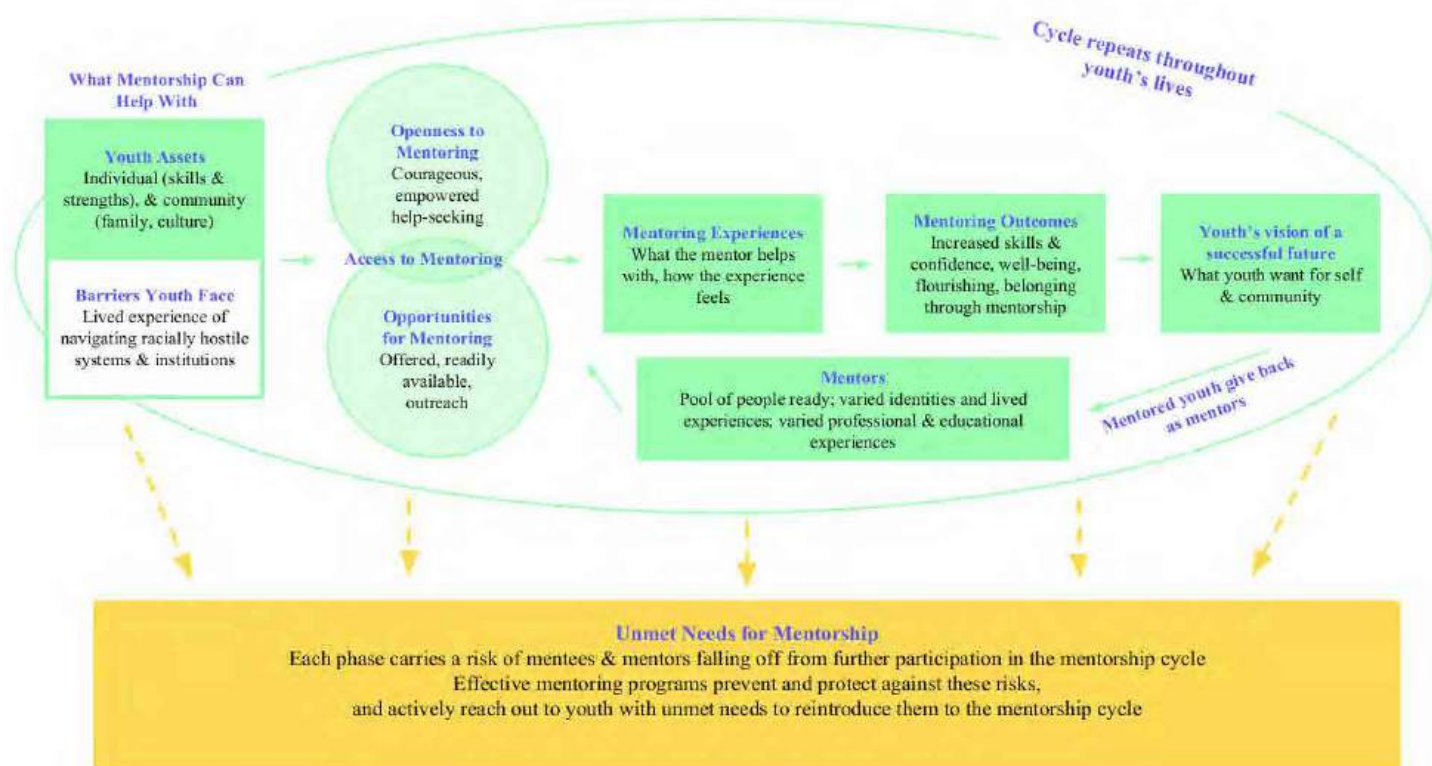
“Finding mentors that would reflect the racialized identities of the mentees is often difficult. We try our best, but you know we’d rather pair them with somebody that isn’t racialized than nobody at all so that’s or that’s what takes priority in that case.”

Some mentor stakeholders shared that having adequate funding is important to reduce barriers to accessing mentoring. Offering food or stipends for coffee chats with mentors is important and encourages youth participation, especially among those facing barriers to engagement.

Programs struggle to make sure youth have **awareness** about the mentorship opportunities that are available. This is especially true for programs that are more targeted, trying to reach a specific group of youth. One mentor stakeholder discussed challenges in helping youth to learn about and choose from a selection of programs, recognizing that even an “amazing program” might not automatically be the “right fit” for a given youth.

Conclusions

Theory of Change



This Theory of Change presents an overview of a mentorship cycle for racialized young adults, grounded in the research findings. Mentorship cycles may repeat throughout youth's lives, considering that mentoring needs will evolve and emerge throughout young adulthood as they go through key transitions in their education and career journeys. When considering what mentoring can offer racialized youth, it is critical to first recognize that racialized youth bring strengths and assets – both on an individual and community level – to mentoring relationships. At the same time, they bring lived experiences of having faced barriers, particularly in navigating racially hostile systems and institutions.

For racialized youth to gain access to mentorship, they must have both opportunities, and openness. Mentorship opportunities should be readily available and low barrier, with active outreach by mentors who come to youth. Being open to mentorship opportunities demonstrates courage and empowerment on the part of youth, especially when their lived experiences may have shown them that help-seeking is not always safe or successful. Access to mentoring also requires available mentors – both natural and program mentors. Racialized young adults have a range of preferences and priorities and may want to match with a mentor

based on aspects of identity and lived experiences, or based on professional or educational backgrounds. Youth choice is vital.

The mentoring experience, including the type of support offered by the mentor and how the experience feels to the youth, determines the potential for positive outcomes. Mentorship has the power to unlock increased skills and confidence in racialized young adults, and to foster well-being, flourishing, and belonging. This is the foundation for racialized youth to pursue their unique vision of a successful future, focused on mental and physical wellness, balance, financial success, stability, and freedom. Importantly, racialized young adults care deeply about giving back to others, and value reciprocity in mentorship. Youth who experience successful mentorship are motivated to become mentors themselves, continuing the mentorship cycle.

The power and potential of mentorship can go unrealized, resulting in youth with unmet needs for mentorship. Each phase carries a risk of either mentees or mentors falling off from further participation in the mentorship cycle: youth may face too many barriers, or may not be able to access mentorship due to a lack of openness or opportunity, or they may have an ineffectual or even harmful experience with a mentor. Mentoring programs must be intentional about preventing and protecting against these risks. They must identify and actively reach out to youth with unmet needs to reintroduce them to the mentorship cycle.

Positioning the Research Findings in the Existing Literature

In this section, we present key findings from this research and position them alongside themes from existing mentoring literature, highlighting ways in which the research findings align with – and deepen – understanding of effective mentoring for racialized young adults.

What mentorship means for racialized youth

While youth in this study tended to emphasize career mentoring when discussing mentoring, there was no one fits all approach, and some youth emphasized the need for mentoring across various aspects of their lives, including regarding personal relationships and cultural mentoring. Further, once a relationship has developed, youth feel more comfortable sharing aspects with their lives with their mentors that are not necessarily related to career or work. In mentoring literature, this multiplicity is at times not recognized. For example, one meta-analysis of mentoring literature divides mentoring into youth, academic/workplace, and formal

and informal mentoring (Eby et al. 2008), which does not consider how these categories do not need to be mutually exclusive. In our study, youth emphasized more holistic understandings of mentorship as opposed to a siloed approach.

How mentors and mentoring programs can best support racialized youth

Youth who we spoke with emphasized that mentoring relationships should be youth led. Mentors should not impose their opinions on youth but rather work with youth to determine how youth can be best supported by the mentoring relationship. Similarly, the literature explores principles and best practices for mentors and mentoring programs to engage with BIPOC youth, including youth driven – as opposed to mentor driven – support. This includes, for example, providing youth with the opportunity to grow on their own terms, and working collaboratively with youth to help them set their own goals (as opposed to telling youth what to do) as outlined in Guiding Principles for Engaging Indigenous Youth (Pidgeon et al. 2019), all of which were echoed in our interviews with youth. Further, youth perceived mentoring relationships as reciprocal, in that they could also share their skills with mentors.

Representative mentoring and how mentors can build trust with racialized youth

The mentoring literature explores how potential mentors can gain racialized youths' trust, and how these processes differ between white and racialized mentors. In interviews conducted with 40 adolescent girls of colour taking part in a community-based mentoring program, youth reported greater cultural mistrust toward white mentors, and this was a significant predictor of decreased 'instrumental relationship satisfaction' among girls with white mentors (Sánchez et al. 2018). In a US survey of 231 college students of colour (Garcia-Murillo et al. 2023), having a more similar ethnicity-race with their mentor had significant and positive associations with students' self-esteem. Further, in a literature review, it was found that one program in Australia that matched Indigenous students with older Indigenous youth as role models and mentors saw significant improvements in students' school attendance and goal setting, and a decrease in their suspension rates (Bruce and Marlin, 2012)

In contrast, Champion et al. (2021), in a study drawing on administrative data, found that after a year of mentoring, Black and Hispanic youth who were assigned a same-race/ethnicity mentor had only slightly higher increases in self-perceived school ability and less favourable attitudes towards risky behaviours

when compared to youth with differing-race/ethnicity mentors. The difference between the groups were less significant than expected. Experts who we initially spoke at the outset of the study also highlighted that same-raced mentors do not necessarily lead to more favourable outcomes for youth. Other experts were interested in what youth do when same-race/ethnicity mentors are not available, for example in certain careers or sectors where there are systemic barriers against BIPOC groups, and this was a reality that youth in our study faced. Often, they are looking for mentors in white-male dominated spaces.

Youth in our study also shared that there is likely more inherent trust with either BIPOC mentors in general, or mentors with whom they share racial and/or ethno-cultural identities. Youth have experiences where they have experienced racism/ been Othered/rejected by white people or people from outside of their racial and/or ethno-cultural groups, echoing one review of the literature which found that mentors may cause psychological harm to youth through racial bias and/or unawareness of privilege (Albright et al. 2017). However, youth in our study also asserted that their communities are heterogeneous and operate in plurality: just because a potential mentor shares one aspect of identity with a youth does not automatically mean that this person is the best mentor for this youth. Youth were not dissuaded from seeking out or building relationships with mentors who hold different identities to them, including white mentors. Rather, youth shared that trust can be built with white mentors and mentors with whom they do not share identities, if mentors operate from frameworks of decolonization, anti-oppression and practice cultural humility (Fisher-Borne et al. 2015).

Mentor screening and training

As above, existing literature cautions that mentors can cause harm to racialized youth, emphasizing the need for careful mentor screening and training. One current randomized control trial is testing their assumption that providing additional training and support to volunteer mentors who are paired with youth of colour may help to provide youth of colour with better support in mentor programming (Sánchez et al., 2025). Youth and mentor stakeholders in our study similarly emphasized the importance of potential youth of colour mentors to take part in anti-racist, decolonial, and cultural humility training. The literature also underscores the need for screening processes to be put in place for mentor-type programs, and for youth themselves to be involved in mentor screening process, as well as ongoing check-ins and re-assessments (Albright et al. 2017). Further, the need for ongoing mentor training after the mentoring relationship is initiated is a key theme in the literature (Duron et al. 2020; Lee 2018; Sánchez et al. 2014; Kaufman et al. 2023). Sánchez et al. (2014) provide a checklist of best practices for practitioners,

including training around:

- Racial similarity/dissimilarity
- Oppression
- Ethnic identity
- Cultural competence and cultural humility

They further recommend to “consider providing training programs for mentors and staff that are organized around the components of Sue’s (2006) cultural competence framework (cultural awareness and beliefs, cultural knowledge, and cultural skills) and that include a discussion of the social construction of race” (2014: 154). Recent research has argued that mentors should be trained to adopt cultural humility rather than simply focusing on cultural competence. Cultural humility in mentoring refers to mentors’ critical examination of their worldviews and social power differentials that influence them, their mentees, and their mentoring relationship (Anderson & Sanchez, 2022)

Duron et al. (2020) noted through their interviews with mentors that mentoring processes included mentors’ work of:

- Establishing a connection despite differences
- Identifying mentees’ personal and environmental challenges
- Raising consciousness around structural issues

Building on this, youth and mentor stakeholders in our study identified how structural issues, including systemic racism, capitalism, and settler colonialism, as well as micro-practices of these systems – microaggressions impact their lives (Tate, 2020).

What an ideal mentorship program might look like for racialized youth

While there are many best practices and recommendations in the peer reviewed and grey literature, as well as some empirical work done with mentors themselves, there is very little work that has directly asked racialized youth what would work best for them. Therefore, our study provides an important contribution to this area. For example, one ‘Critical Mentoring’ framework (Weiston-Serdan 2023) includes practices for mentoring like: co-develop program goals with youth; recruit and retain racialized staff and volunteers and engage with community; and implement anti-oppressive and intersectional mentor training. Such practices were echoed in our interviews with youth, specifically co-designing programs with youth.

Another approach in the literature, Youth-Initiated Mentoring (YIM) (Schwartz et al. 2016) has been proposed, where youth nominate adults in their pre-existing social networks to serve as their mentors. While this may work for some youth, in our study it was evident that a YIM approach is likely not always appropriate for youth, especially youth who have limited networks and social capital to draw upon or youth who have low levels of trust and could be confronted with additional rejection if their nominated adults decline their requests to be their mentors. In fact, youth in our study emphasized the importance of being able to access mentors outside of their own social networks, including outside of their own socio-economic class.

Other topics highlighted in the literature that were validated by our youth participants included:

- The need for both structured programs and informal opportunities (RBC 2023), there is no one size fits all approach
- The need for both in-person and online mentoring opportunities (Bruce and Marlin 2012)
- Youth's interest in targeted and tailored programs based on race/cultural/ other identities, as opposed to general programs targeting a broad range of youth (Sánchez et al. 2018). Additionally, Black and Indigenous participants highlighted how spaces and programming targeted to them specifically would be welcome. Their experiences signal the specific ways that anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racisms operate, and youth need both respite from and spaces to strategize against these specific racisms. Targeted programming for Indigenous and Black youth also reflects findings from the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business' mapping study (2022), which consisted of a review of the literature and interviews found that there is a need to develop culturally relevant mentorship for Indigenous youth. Further, in interviews and focus groups with Black young adult program participants, Daniel (2018) found that key themes included the importance of youth being exposed to multiple frames and conceptions of Blackness. Daniel (2023) also argues for the need of a racial oasis for Black youth in white post-secondary institutions.
- The importance of programming that includes wrap-around supports (Future Skills Centre 2023; Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business 2022)
- The importance to youth of program participation compensation and paid experiential learning opportunities (Catalyst Future of Canada Centre; Wallace 2022)

Types of mentorship

Much of the literature on racialized youth mentoring focuses on the various types of

mentorship that youth may receive.

Some of the key frameworks found in the literature include:

- Capital and core mentors (Gowdy et al. 2023): capital mentors are people outside of youths' immediate social network who provide information and guidance, whereas core mentors are people in youths' immediate social network, including figures who provide emotional and instrumental support
- Natural mentors (Denner and Torres 2023): informal relationships with adults outside of youths' families, which could include mentors who may provide racialized youth with missing cultural capital to navigate (predominantly white) institutions

These frameworks were echoed in this study's interviews; youth accessed multiple types of mentorship, as well as held mentorships (examples of one youth who has multiple mentors).

Recommendations and Implications for practice

Racialized youth clearly see the value of mentorship. They understand how mentors are essential assets to support their transition to adulthood. Racialized young adults' appetite for mentoring is strong, even among respondents who have never had a mentor.

Several racialized young people benefited from mentoring relationships with natural mentors (supportive individuals with whom they organically developed a mentoring relationship) or program mentors (individuals with whom they developed a relationship in the context of a structured mentoring program). However, a significant mentoring gap impedes racialized young people's timely access to meaningful mentoring opportunities. More than four out of five racialized youth who participated in this study reported that they faced at least one barrier in accessing mentorship since they turned 18, including not knowing how to find a natural mentor or a program mentor or not understanding how mentorship could be helpful.

Youth need a constellation of supportive relationships to thrive. This study emphasized how racialized youth can rely on significant individual, familial, and community assets to support their development. Therefore, racialized young adults see mentorship as a targeted rather than a general source of support, one which complements the support they receive from their immediate networks.

This study uncovered several additional insights on what impactful mentorship entails for racialized young adults in Canada, thus providing helpful guidance for organizations seeking to leverage mentoring to youth's development. In its simplest

form, racialized youth are looking for mentors who can walk alongside them and open doors for them. They seek mentors who can join and expand their social world.

The right mentors...

Racialized young adults primarily see mentoring as a career resource. They tend to have an instrumental view of mentoring, regarding mentorship as a conduit to help them achieve their goals. They seek mentors who can help them explore careers, develop and hone relevant skills, and build the confidence and networks needed to pursue opportunities. They are not looking for just any mentor; they want capital mentors who can complement the support they receive from their immediate networks (Gowdy et al., 2022). This career support can be especially meaningful for the racialized survey respondents indicated that the support they receive from their parents regarding career decision-making is challenging, either because their parents are not very involved (e.g., newcomer parents who may not have the information and knowledge to guide career-related decisions) or because their parents expect them to follow a specific education or career path.

Mentoring programs can maximize their impact by facilitating connections with mentors who can provide guidance, possess skills, experiences, and connections, and can introduce youth to opportunities beyond what they access through their immediate networks. However, as participants in the stakeholder interviews underlined, mentoring alone is likely insufficient to address systemic inequities. Mentoring programs should also work with mentors and help them understand how to ethically and effectively advocate for or sponsor their mentees.

Respondents explained that mentoring relationships do not necessarily need to be very close or deep to be effective. However, many still valued the validation, encouragement, and listening ear that mentors can offer. They explained that good mentors make them feel seen, heard, understood, and valued. Many are interested in developing a relationship with a mentor who can walk alongside them for a sustained period instead of a shorter engagement, which allows for more time for building trust. Importantly, they value mentors who can be partners instead of prescriptive mentors. They value mentors who ask the right questions, collaborate with them to set and work towards realistic goals, and empower them to make their own decisions. Although racialized young adults prefer a more instrumental approach to mentoring, programs should not overlook the importance of mentors' social and emotional skills and collaborative skills. Programs should consider how they can help mentors enhance and apply these skills in their mentoring relationships.

Racialized youth value being able to relate and connect with a mentor, but they cautioned that race is not the only or even the primary criterion that should guide matching mentors and mentees. Although a shared racialized identity can enhance relatability and shared understanding, study participants often placed greater importance on shared education or career interests, lived experiences, and shared values. Since there is no one-size-fits-all approach to matching mentors and mentees, programs should consider what criteria matter the most to their mentees. Giving mentees a voice and choice in the matching process increases the chances that they can form a connection with their mentors.

Although not all racialized young people seek mentors who share their racial or ethnocultural backgrounds, study participants drew the line at educating mentors about racialized experiences. Therefore, it is vital that programs provide cultural humility and anti-racism training for mentors. Without this knowledge, mentors are unlikely to build safe and effective mentoring relationships with racialized youth, and worse, they could cause harm.

... at the right time

Study participants saw mentoring as a critical asset to support them through the many transitions that punctuate emerging adulthood. Existing programs and services often fail to bridge the gap between one phase and the next, leaving many young people feeling uncertain and unsupported. Mentors can be incredibly impactful when they provide consistent support between two stages in a young person's life, such as the transition from high school to post-secondary education or the transition from school to career. Although significant life transitions are at the top of the mind, youth value mentors' guidance and support through minor transitions such as managing personal finances for the first time, picking a major or extracurricular activity, or changing jobs. A significant mentoring gap impacts youth aged 25 to 30, with few programs available for that age group.

Racialized young adults report feeling acute pressure to succeed in spaces that are not always safe for them, leading many to experience burnout. Mentoring programs should carefully consider if they inadvertently contribute to the pressure youth experience. Racialized youth stressed that mental and physical health and work-life balance were top priorities for them. Programs can work with mentors to help alleviate the pressure youth experience and help them achieve balance. As this study has shown, mentors can help youth navigate pressure by assisting them to develop healthy coping mechanisms and set realistic goals. Mentors can normalize mistakes, failure, and changing course. Mentors can set a powerful example by openly sharing their experiences with failure and overcoming it.

Research has shown that mentors who can “be real” – that is, be authentic and vulnerable without crossing boundaries or burdening the mentees – can develop stronger mentoring relationships (Rhodes, 2023). Some mentors might consider that being a good role model is incompatible with disclosing weaknesses and mistakes. Consequently, programs should be explicit about the benefits of being authentic and sharing experiences of success as well as failure between mentors and mentees.

The right mentoring opportunity

This study demonstrated that there is no consensus about what the ideal mentoring program looks like. For example, some youth prefer group mentoring for its ability to foster community, while others prefer the focused attention provided by one-on-one mentoring relationships. This underscores how programs must customize their offering to respond to the specific needs and goals of the young people they aim to serve. Critically, racialized youth want a seat at the table right from the start. They want to be involved in designing mentorship programs that align with their priorities.

Study participants stressed how crucial it was for programs to foster an environment where racialized youth “can just show up” as themselves without fear of judgment. Creating such an environment allows youth to let their guard down, share openly, and receive support willingly. Therefore, programs must be explicit about how they strive to create safer and identity-affirming spaces where racialized youth can be their authentic selves.

Finally, as a result of experiences of discrimination, racism, and othering, many racialized young adults prefer to solve problems on their own and are reluctant to reach out to natural mentors and programs on their own. Therefore, mentoring programs must proactively engage youth and demonstrate how they benefit program participants. Racialized youth emphasized how offering mentoring opportunities in the spaces where they are already present (e.g., schools, workplaces) and allowing flexibility (e.g., the ability to meet online) can alleviate challenges such as limited free time and transportation costs and encourage participation.

Shifting the focus from social capital to community cultural wealth

Since young adults need a constellation of supportive relationships throughout their lives, programs and mentors should work in tandem to explore how they can build the mentees’ social capital, the network of people youth can count on to

provide support and opportunities. This study demonstrated that mentors can be highly effective in this area by helping youth strengthen their networking and help-seeking skills and behaviours, as well as by helping youth connect with people and services who can help them achieve their goals.

However, a narrow focus on social capital does not recognize the cultural wealth and the several forms of capital racialized communities possess. Overlooking the other forms of capital mentors can strengthen also undermines the potential of mentoring to tackle social inequities. It ignores the importance racialized youth place on contributing to social change and the role mentorship can play in enabling that change (Yosso, 2005).

This study illustrated how mentors help young adults develop a positive sense of self. Mentors significantly influence young people's confidence, self-esteem, optimism, self-advocacy, and belongingness, all of which contribute to their agency and resilience. Racialized youth also reported that their mentors helped them process experiences of discrimination, learn how to interact and communicate across cultures, think critically about racism and injustices, and take action to bring about social change. Thus, our findings highlight how, when done right, mentorship can support the development of essential forms of capital for racialized youth, including:

- Aspirational capital: the ability to remain hopeful, even when facing barriers, which fuels youths' commitment to push for social change,
- Linguistic capital: the skills to communicate in more than one language or style and to adapt communication based on context,
- Navigational capital: the ability and skills to navigate and advocate for themselves in institutions and systems which were not created by or for racialized communities and can be racially hostile (e.g., education system, workplaces),
- Resistance capital: the ability and motivation to challenge inequities and work for social change.

Mentoring programs can work with mentors to strengthen these essential forms of capital and develop the associated skills, knowledge, and mindsets. By doing so, they can reduce the chances of inadvertently perpetuating inequities and increase the likelihood of providing transformative



Yosso's Model of Community Cultural Wealth

mentoring experiences. Importantly, this approach to developing forms of capital beyond social capital supports racialized young adults' desire to give back and make a difference.

In conclusion, access to one mentor at one point is unlikely to address all racialized young people's mentoring needs. This study highlighted how youth seek multiple mentors to support different aspects of their lives throughout their journey toward adulthood. As one interview participant eloquently said, "I don't think there's ever going to be a time that I don't need a mentor. And I also don't think that every aspect of my life needs mentorship."

Mentoring programs are not the only solution to tackling the mentoring gap for racialized youth. These programs provide essential development opportunities and are often well-placed to provide mentors who can expand young people's social world. However, only a small proportion of young people (approximately one-fifth in this study) will participate in a formal mentoring program. Natural mentoring relationships are by far the most prevalent form of mentoring for youth, and the significance of natural mentors and other supportive relationships must not be underestimated. These organic relationships are critical to young people's personal, educational, and professional journeys. Therefore, to tackle the mentoring gap, communities, schools, and employers must work together to ensure that racialized youth can access the right natural or program mentors at the right time.

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